Sacred Visions

Early Paintings from Central Tibet

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Steven M. Kossak

Jane Casey Singer

With an essay by

Robert Bruce-Gardner

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Frontispiece: Green Tara (detail). Attributed to the Nepalese artist Aniko. Central Tibet, third quarter of the thirteenth century. Distemper on cloth. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1970.156) (cat. no. 37)

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Director's Foreword

"Sacred Visions" is the first exhibition devoted solely to early paintings from central Tibet and, as such, is a historic event, marking the initial presentation of a large body of works that have been carefully assembled after rigorous examination by scholars. It is astonishing that so many paintings, in such remarkable condition, are extant yet comparatively unknown. The remarkably dry climate and high altitude of Tibet were surely important factors in their preservation, as is the fact that many of them had been preserved inside sealed monuments as relics or were part of the patrimony of the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that flourished undisturbed until recent times. The paintings were chosen primarily for their aesthetic quality and condition; their iconography was considered only secondarily. The works were created at the time that parallels the late medieval and early Renaissance eras in Europe, a formative period before the Tibetans had fully synthesized their own artistic traditions.

An unusual story unfolds in the course of studying the paintings: in the eleventh century Tibetans first embraced Indian Buddhism with fervor and then, lacking a developed artistic tradition, became sophisticated patrons of Indian and, later, Nepalese artists. These works then became the models for an indigenous artistic tradition that largely mimicked them. The situation was unique: Tibet was a country in which a foreign religion and several waves of foreign artistic models were adopted as the primary cultural influences. Equally important, since little large-scale painting of the mid-eleventh through the fourteenth century from either India or Nepal has survived, the works produced for Tibetan patrons prove extraordinarily significant for the study of those two cultures as well. Our emphasis on artistic excellence has brought this dynamic into sharp focus, so many lesser, derivative works were not included. These works transform our understanding of Himalayan painting and that of medieval eastern India as well, demonstrating the roots of later Tibetan painting, which was only slowly created from a mélange of sources including Indian, Central Asian, Nepalese, and Chinese models. The beginnings of that synthesis are represented here by the last group of works in the exhibition, which presage the truly indigenous Tibetan expression that flowered in the late fifteenth century.

This publication brings together the scholarly expertise of Steven M. Kossak, Associate Curator at the Metropolitan Museum, who also coordinated the exhibition, and the art historian Jane Casey Singer. Robert Bruce-Gardner, Director, Department of Conservation and Technology, the Courtauld Institute, London, has contributed an essay on painting technique.

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Philippe de Montebello
Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Steven M. Kossak
Jane Casey Singer

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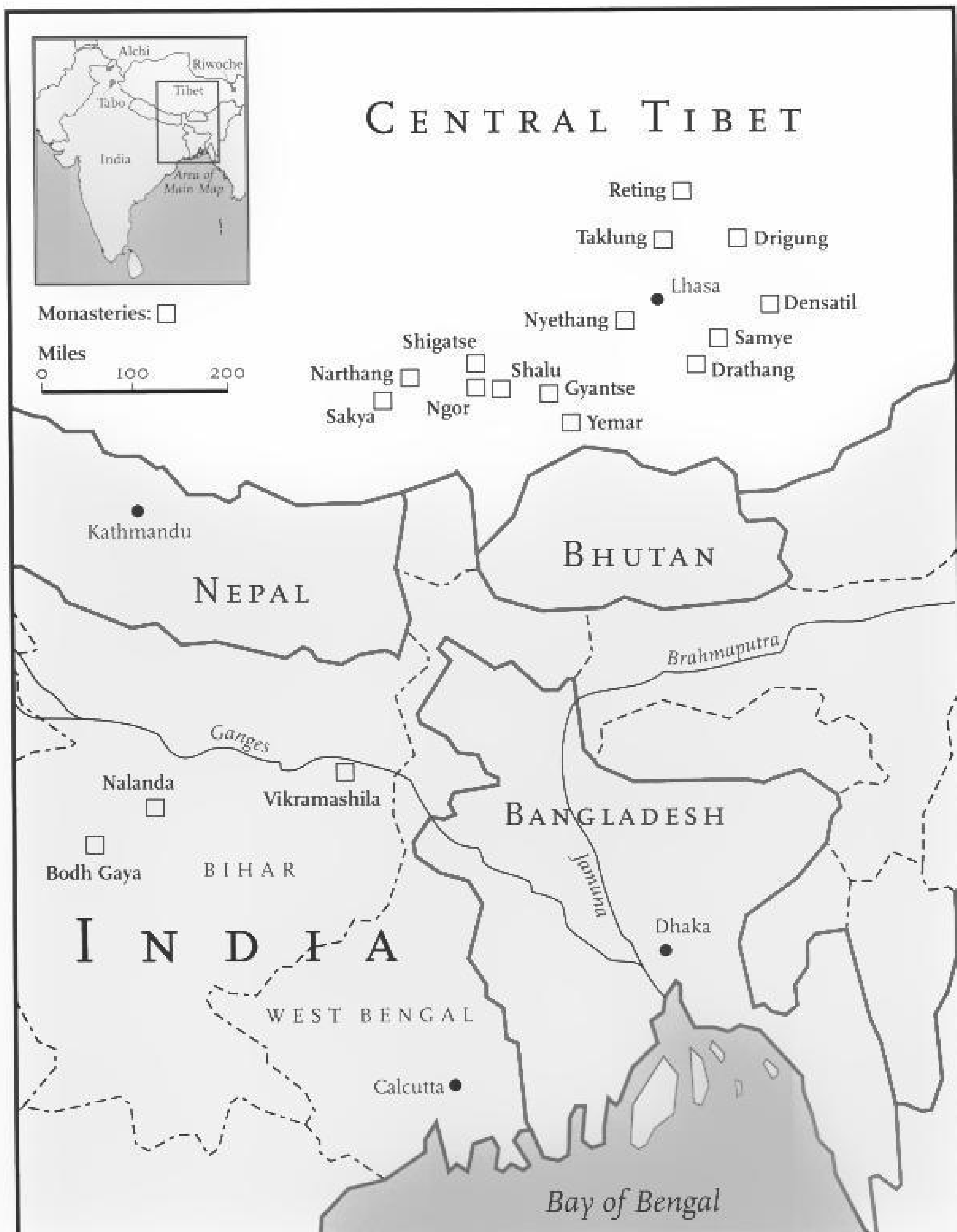
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Note to the Reader

Because of the complex relationship of script to pronunciation, Tibetan words are rendered phonetically in order to make them accessible to the general reader. Sanskrit terms are also rendered phonetically and without the usual diacritics.

Abbreviated references are used in the note citations. For full listings, see the Bibliography of Works Cited.

Dimensions are given in centimeters followed by inches, which have been rounded to the nearest eighth of an inch. Height precedes width.


Central Tibet
Alchi
Riwoche
Tibet
Tabo
India
Area of Main Map
Monasteries:
Miles
0
100
200
Reting
Taklung
Drigung
Lhasa
Densatil
Nyethang
Samye
Shigatse
Drathang
Narthang
Shalu
Gyantse
Sakya
Ngor
Yemar
Kathmandu
Bhutan
Nepal
Brahmaputra
Ganges
Nalanda
Vikramashila
Bangladesh
Bodh Gaya
Bihar
Jamuna
Dhaka
India
West Bengal
Calcutta
Bay of Bengal

Sacred Visions

Early Paintings from Central Tibet



The Cultural Roots of Early Central Tibetan Painting

Jane Casey Singer

The focus of this exhibition is central Tibetan painting of the eleventh through the mid-fifteenth century, a period roughly corresponding to that described by Tibetan historians as the Chidar, "the Later Diffusion [of the Buddhist faith]." During this extraordinary time, Tibet became one of the great Buddhist civilizations of Asia. Thousands of Indian Buddhist texts were translated into Tibetan, hundreds of Buddhist monuments were built to adorn Tibet's vast landscape, and countless young men and women entered the ranks of the burgeoning monastic orders. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the country had gained an international reputation as the Buddhist holy land, having supplanted India in this respect after the late-twelfth-century Muslim invasions of northern India. Throughout this period Tibetans commissioned and created paintings of exquisite splendor; they mastered ancient painting traditions from abroad and transformed them to express their own sacred visions.

The earliest central Tibetan paintings of the Chidar are filled with imagery and elements of style commonly found in eastern Indian art. Indeed, aesthetic and iconographic canons from eastern India formed the basis of one of the two major styles of painting in central Tibet from the eleventh until the beginning of the fifteenth century. The second main style was inspired by the artistic culture of the Kathmandu Valley, whose artists were favored by the monastic order of the Sakyas in Tibet beginning at least as early as the thirteenth century. This essay explores the profound cultural ties between Tibet and eastern India and, much more briefly, between Tibet and Nepal, which gave these foreign styles such powerful resonance in the early monastic communities of Tibet. Steven M. Kossak analyzes the characteristics of these two painting styles in the following essay.

Preparing the Ground: Tibetan Painting During the Ngadar

Many of the early Tibetan monarchs (r. ca. 620–842) vigorously championed Buddhism and its arts. Our knowledge of Tibetan painting in this period is fragmentary and therefore difficult to assess; nevertheless it provides crucial background for understanding painting of the Chidar. Once a loosely organized confederation of nomadic and agricultural tribes, Tibet became one of Asia's great imperial powers under Songtsen Gampo (d. 649), the first monarch of the historical period, and his successors. In the seventh century, Tibet's neighbors were predominantly Buddhist, and, beginning in the reign of Songtsen Gampo, parts of India, Nepal, China, and much of Central Asia were intermittently controlled by Tibetan forces. A remarkable ruler, Songtsen Gampo became fascinated with Buddhism (and indeed all foreign cultures with which he came into contact) and deliberately imported aspects of Buddhist faith and culture from abroad, an extraordinary effort described in Tibetan literature as the Ngadar, "the Earlier Diffusion" of the Buddhist faith.[1]

Buddhism of this period in Tibet was largely a court religion. Emissaries, led by Thonmi Sambhota, were sent to India to learn Sanskrit and to create the first alphabet for the Tibetan language. By the mid-seventh century, the first Tibetan legal treatises appeared,[2] and under royal patronage, efforts were

Opposite: Tara (detail), cat. no. 3

made to translate Indian Buddhist literature into Tibetan. Samye, the first monastery in Tibet, was completed and dedicated in about the year 779, and in 791 Buddhism was declared Tibet's official religion. Soon afterward, King Trisong Detsen (r. ca. 755–97) arbitrated a disputation, described in some accounts as a formal debate at Samye, to determine whether Tibetans should follow the Chinese or the Indian tradition of Buddhism.[3] The Chinese monk Mahayana expounded the "sudden path" to enlightenment, whereas the Indian proponent Kamalashila advocated the "gradual path," with its emphasis on compassionate deeds and gradual spiritual awakening. Trisong Detsen declared Kamalashila the victor, an outcome probably determined as much by the monarch's political preferences as by his philosophical commitments. Throughout Trisong Detsen's reign, Tibetan and Chinese armies battled for territory; in 763 Tibetan troops briefly controlled the Chinese capital, Changan.[4]

The decision to follow Indian Buddhism had far-reaching consequences. During Relpachen's reign (ca. 815–38), Sanskrit became the only foreign language officially approved as a source of Buddhist literature, and Buddhist texts in Chinese, Khotanese, and other Central Asian languages were no longer translated into Tibetan. At Samye monastery and elsewhere, teams of Tibetans and Indians translated Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. A Sanskrit–Tibetan lexicon, completed during Relpachen's reign and known as the *Mahavyutpatti*, was intended to ensure greater uniformity and accuracy in translations of the often recondite philosophical language used in Indian Buddhist texts.

Painting

Early Tibetan historians suggest that it was through contacts with India during the seventh and eighth centuries that Tibetans first learned of Buddhist painting. The Tibetan historian Taranatha (1575–1634?) mentions several Indian artists by name, including two Bengalis, Dhiman and his son Bitpalo. Dhiman and Bitpalo lived in the Varendra region and are said to have been contemporaries of the Pala rulers Dharmapala (ca. 775–812) and Devapala (ca. 812–850).[5] Because no Indian cloth painting (known as *pata* in Sanskrit) of this early period survives, it is difficult to determine the impact of this genre on contemporaneous Tibetan works.

However, Tibetans also encountered Buddhist painting at Central Asian centers such as Khotan, Kashgar, and Kucha, which Tibetan troops controlled sporadically throughout the seventh, eighth, and



Figure 1. Bodhisattva Vajrapani. Dunhuang, ca. 9th century. Distemper on cloth. British Museum, London (OA 1919.1–1.0101/Ch.lvi.008)

ninth centuries. A ninth-century image of Bhaisajyaguru (the Medicine Buddha), uncovered among the ruins at Khocho, exemplifies a Central Asian tradition of painting that might also have inspired early Tibetan artists.[6] The painting's format is essentially that of the Tibetan *thanka*: an image painted on (in this instance, both sides of) a rectangular cloth, framed by a narrow cloth border, with the top fixed for hanging.

Between about 787 and 848, Tibetans controlled the prominent Chinese pilgrimage site of Dunhuang, in Gansu province. Among the thousands of early paintings and manuscripts discovered in a hoard there at the turn of the nineteenth century, a small group is particularly relevant to the history of Tibetan painting. Chief among these are over a dozen early-ninth-century painted cloth banners (now in the British Museum, London; the Musée Guimet, Paris; and the National Museum of India, New Delhi); they are, quite possibly, the earliest surviving examples of Tibetan painting. Each of these narrow (ca. 50 × 20 cm [19⅝ × 7⅞ in.]) banners features a standing bodhisattva, executed in a style quite unlike that of contemporaneous Chinese painting from the same hoard. Many of the bodhisattvas—probably modeled on Indian or Nepalese prototypes—wear Indian skirts (dhotis) and Indian jewelry. The banners also reveal familiarity with the Indian technique of foreshortening, *kshayavrddhi* (lesser, greater), whereby the artist contracts (*kshaya*) the parts of the face farthest from the viewer and enlarges (*vrddhi*) those closest. Brief Tibetan inscriptions appear on some of these banners, such as the Vajrapani (fig. 1) in the British Museum, which bears a Tibetan transliteration of the deity's Sanskrit name.

There are strong parallels between the style of these banners and that of sketches found in the eighth- through tenth-century Tibetan manuscripts uncovered at Dunhuang. These documents include sketches of warriors, yogins, demons, animals, landscapes, and mandalas. Their inspiration might in some cases come from established Buddhist iconography,[7] but in most instances they appear to be simplistic renderings of the imagination or, sometimes, drawn from life.[8]

Whatever the original provenance of these Dunhuang works, they remain as candidates for the earliest examples of Tibetan painting: the Tibetan inscriptions, the strong Indic associations, their relatively unsophisticated execution—as one would expect of a painting tradition in its earliest stages—are all indications of origin. Moreover, these works share stylistic features with contemporaneous rock carvings in eastern Tibet—for example, those at Drak Lhamo (ca. 775–97) and Denma Drak (ca. 816). The Tibetologist Amy Heller has noted the striking parallels between these approximately ninth-century Dunhuang paintings and murals in the Jokhang temple in Lhasa.[9]

Although no major work from this period can indisputably be attributed to a Tibetan painter, it is clear that Tibetans were familiar with the Buddhist painting of India, Nepal, China, and Central Asia, and it is also likely that Tibetans were beginning to practice this art not only in the Central Asian territories—which they intermittently occupied—but in central Tibet as well. The seventh-century Jokhang and Ramoche temples in Lhasa and the Samye monastery were founded under royal patronage, built and adorned by local as well as foreign artists.

Under the patronage of Songtsen Gampo and his successors, Tibetans began to forge a tradition of Buddhist art. However, the social, economic, and artistic conditions—widespread demand for works of art, the patronage to support artistic endeavors, and trained artists—necessary to establish an indigenous painting tradition were still undeveloped when Buddhism came under attack after the assassination of the pro-Buddhist king Relpachen in about 838.[10] His elder brother and successor, Lang Darma—a supporter of Bon, the pre-Buddhist indigenous court religion of Tibet—was assassinated about 842, igniting long-held antagonisms between Buddhist and Bon adherents. The monarchy splintered, thus dissipating the impetus behind Buddhism and the nascent art of Tibetan Buddhist painting.[11] Buddhists fled to western and eastern Tibet, and for the next few generations, Buddhism was practiced in these regions on a much diminished scale and—surreptitiously—in central Tibet as well.[12]

The Second Introduction of Buddhism (Chidar)

Renewed interest in Buddhism arose at the turn of the eleventh century, the beginning of a period described by Tibetan historians as the Chidar, the "Later Diffusion [of the Buddhist Faith]." Early literary sources describe ten aspiring Buddhists from central Tibet led by Lume who, unable to receive ordination in that region, journeyed to Tentik in the Amdo region of eastern Tibet, where the tradition of monastic ordination had been maintained.[13] After ordination, they returned to central Tibet where they reopened and reconsecrated earlier temples and founded new establishments, such as the Moragyel temple of 1009.[14]

Whereas the earlier introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist art had been largely restricted to royal

and aristocratic circles, at this time Buddhism had enormous popular appeal. Leading Tibetan Buddhists of the eleventh century recognized the need to deepen their intellectual understanding of Buddhism and to "purify" their practice, which had degenerated during the long period of neglect following Lang Darma's death in 842.[15] Because Buddhism originated in India and most of its doctrines were developed there, Tibetans sought to model their belief on that practiced in India. In religion and in art, Tibetans apprenticed themselves to the great masters of India, a long and fruitful association that continued uninterrupted for over two hundred years. The Tibetan pilgrim Dharmasvamin (1197–1264) captured the sentiments of many Tibetans when he described Bodh Gaya, the eastern Indian site of the historical Buddha's enlightenment, as "the very center of the World."[16]

Tibetan Apprenticeship in India (ca. 1000–1200)

Although Buddhism was on the wane in most parts of medieval India, it was in a comparatively flourishing state in eastern India. The strength of medieval Indian Buddhism lay in its great monastic universities, the *mahaviharas*, where its various doctrines were studied and recorded. During the medieval period, Nalanda, Odantapuri, Vikramashila, and Paharpur were among the most prominent centers.[17] The *mahaviharas* were interconnected by a steady stream of pilgrims and scholars who carried doctrines, news, and works of art from one center to another. Recognized throughout the Buddhist world, these institutions housed thousands of monks and were known for their vast libraries and their brilliant academicians.

Indian Buddhism and its art had enormous influence internationally.[18] Many sacred places, such as Bodh Gaya, the site of the historical Buddha's enlightenment, and Sarnath, where he gave his first sermon, were to be found in territories controlled by the Pala rulers (r. ca. 750–1199) and the Senas (r. ca. 1097–1223), and great spiritual merit accrued to those who visited them. Pilgrims and merchants from Tibet, Nepal, Myanmar (formerly Burma), China, Central Asia, and Indonesia journeyed to eastern India, which lent cosmopolitan allure to its cultural centers and created a cosmopolitan environment in the monastic universities.

Within this international Buddhist community, the Tibetans stood apart by virtue of the particular zeal with which they sought to master the Indian Buddhist tradition. They had both the will and, since Tibet is relatively close to eastern India, the opportunity to observe closely and gradually absorb the highly sophisticated traditions of Buddhism and Buddhist art that flourished in eastern India at this time.

Generation after generation of Tibetan pilgrims flocked to eastern India. They became fluent in Sanskrit—sometimes so fluent that Indians mistook them for countrymen—and they also became proficient in mastering the many Indian scripts.[19] Tibetans lived as monks at Bodh Gaya and at Nalanda and Vikramashila monasteries, sometimes supported by Tibetan patrons, but often living on alms or means provided by the monastery; others supported themselves by acting as interpreters.[20] It is said that by about 1080, Vikramashila monastery housed perhaps one hundred sixty teachers and one thousand students; dormitories assigned specifically to Tibetan students were located just inside one of the monastery's six gates.[21] Each gate was under the direction of an eminent scholar given the title *dvarapala*, or door guardian. A Tibetan scholar of Sanskrit, Tsami Sangyepa,[22] held this post in the twelfth century, which suggests that at least some Tibetans became an integral part of Indian Buddhist monasticism.

Buddhist Doctrines

The Buddhist doctrines flourishing in eastern India at this time were Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) and its further development, the Vajrayana (the Diamond Vehicle), also known as Tantric, or Esoteric, Buddhism. Both became popular in Tibet. The Mahayana tradition, whose literary roots can be traced to the early centuries of the first millennium or before, emphasized a gradual path of spiritual evolution through compassionate deeds and the cultivation of spiritual attributes—such as patience, generosity, wisdom, and compassion—to be perfected over many lifetimes. The archetype of Mahayana practice is the bodhisattva, who seeks enlightenment while compassionately guiding others along the same path.

Mahayana Buddhism involved devotional practices, including the worship of a vast array of celestial Buddhas and bodhisattvas, said to hear the prayers of their devotees and respond to their spiritual, emotional, and material needs. Bodhisattvas such as Manjushri (cat. no. 7), the embodiment of the bodhisattva's wisdom; Maitreya (cat. no. 24), the future Buddha; Avalokiteshvara (cat. no. 12), the embodiment of the bodhisattva's compassion; and Tara (cat. nos. 3, 37), the female goddess of compassion, were all popular in medieval India, and gradually they captured the Tibetan imagination. Images of these gods and goddesses were reproduced in large numbers in stone, metal, wood, and terracotta during the

Figure 2. Yogins meditating in a cremation ground, detail from Chakrasamvara Mandala. Central Tibet, ca. 1100. Distemper on cloth (cat. no. 2)



medieval period. They adorned the many temples and religious structures that once graced this region of eastern India. Often thought to be endowed with miraculous powers, Mahayana images largely served as objects of devotion through which the faithful communicated with the divine.

In her form as Ashtamahabhaya (She Who Protects from the Eight Great Perils), Tara was the patron and guide of Buddhist merchants and pilgrims. The Eight Perils included very real physical dangers to travelers of this period: attacks by lions, wild elephants, snakes, bandits, and the demons who cause disease; being caught in forest fires or floods; and the danger of false imprisonment in foreign territories. Although these fears were also associated with obstacles to spiritual development (for example, lions were associated with pride), there can be no doubt that the beautiful, supremely compassionate Tara (cat. no. 3) was also petitioned, in this form, for protection from the real physical dangers confronting eleventh- and twelfth-century Buddhist travelers. Dharmasvamin, the Tibetan pilgrim to eastern India cited above, wrote of some of these dangers in his thirteenth-century account.[23] He also mentions joining a group of about three hundred travelers in eastern India, stating that he and his companions positioned themselves in the middle of this party, walking "neither to the front, nor behind" in order to be less vulnerable to attack.[24]

Esoteric Buddhism is an ancient tradition whose texts were studied and commented upon in Indian monastic universities from at least the ninth century onward. It offered a radical reinterpretation of the path to spiritual enlightenment, the ultimate goal of all Buddhists. Esoteric theory stated in effect that although one is already enlightened, the untrained, defiled nature of sensory and psychological functions prevents one from realizing it. The *Hevajra Tantra*, an Esoteric text of this period, states: "All beings are Buddhas, but this is obscured by . . . defilement. When this [defilement] is removed, they are buddhas at once, of this there is no doubt."[25] Esoteric practice recommended that these defilements be dispelled not through compassionate deeds exercised over many lifetimes (as in Mahayana practice), but in this lifetime, or in a very few lifetimes, through rigorous meditative exercises (yoga).

The exemplars of Buddhist Esotericism were yogins (practitioners of yoga), many of whom had their formative training in centers like Nalanda and Vikramashila. They became critical of the purely dialectical knowledge available in the rarefied intellectual atmosphere of the *mahaviharas*, so they left these centers to meditate in forests and other secluded locales (fig. 2). Chief among them were members of a group known as the eighty-four mahasiddhas (Highly Accomplished Ones), who formed a spiritual lineage of teachers and disciples that began in early medieval India and extended eventually into Tibet, where they were greatly revered (cat. no. 35). The siddhas came from all the Indian social castes and included women such as Lakshmikara. Tibetans studied with some of these eccentric yoga masters such as Tilopa and Naropa, who appear in the spiritual lineages of many early Tibetan paintings (see cat. nos. 13, 18, 20).

The language of Esoteric texts is intentionally elliptical, written in what has been described as "twilight language" (*sandhyabhasha*). It contains obscure symbolism and alludes to ritual and meditative practices that are often incomprehensible to the uninitiated, requiring interpretation by a qualified master. Tantric Buddhism placed great importance on the teacher, the Indian guru or Tibetan lama, who carefully guided each disciple through the difficult inner terrain—filled with his afflictions and personal demons—which was necessarily traversed during the rapid spiritual transformation that Esotericism promised its adherents.

Judging from the Tantric literature that has been preserved, we find that Esoteric practitioners sometimes used radical methods to overcome their spiritual obstacles. The *Hevajra Tantra* states: "Those things by which evil men are bound, others turn into means and gain thereby release from the bonds of existence. By passion the world is bound, by passion too it is released."[26] Some Tantric texts describe ritualized sexual practices, which may have been enacted as part of Esoteric rites of release. More generally, Esoteric practices can be said to have deliberately flouted religious conventions, recommending, for example, the eating of meat and the drinking of alcohol, both of which—and, of course, sexual activity—were strictly prohibited in the celibate monastic establishments of the day.[27]

That even basic human decency was contravened—or that such behavior was suggested—can be seen in another excerpt from the *Hevajra Tantra*: "'What usage and observance should one follow?' The Lord [Buddha] replied: 'You should slay living beings. You should speak lying words. You should take what is not given. You should frequent others' wives.'"[28] That such means could be advocated, even as a heuristic technique, was possible because Esoteric philosophy postulated that all phenomena are "empty" (*shunya*), that is, essentially devoid of defining characteristics. Radical activities such as those described above could thus be contemplated as a means of breaking free of the practitioner's own conventional notions of spirituality. Moreover, Esotericism taught that enlightenment resulted not from "good" or "bad" behavior but from a profound knowledge of one's self. Works such as this Tantra also point out the importance of proper interpretation of texts by a qualified teacher and also the real danger of such works falling into the hands of those who would interpret them literally, without understanding their subtle meaning.

It is uncertain how truly popular or widespread Esotericism was in medieval India, but it can be seen as a much-needed revitalization of Buddhism, an attempt to focus on spiritual practice rather than mere discourse about spirituality, which, according to some Esoteric proponents, characterized the *mahaviharas*. In eastern India, Esotericism flourished alongside Mahayana practice and an even earlier form of Buddhism, taught by the Sarvastivadins and known somewhat disparagingly as *Hinayana* (the Lesser Vehicle) because of its emphasis on strict monasticism. The biographies of Indian and Tibetan Buddhists of this period suggest that, on the whole, it was believed that one should first master Mahayana practice before attempting Esotericism, for the latter required the highest degree of intellectual and emotional maturity.



Figure 3. Samvara and Vajravarahi, detail from Mandala of Paramasukha Chakrasamvara. Central Tibet, ca. 1400. Distemper on cloth. Private collection (cat. no. 43)

Esoteric Buddhist Art

Esoteric Buddhism, with its different methods for achieving enlightenment, generated new iconographic forms and new roles for its imagery. These were recorded in a vast body of literature, which was preserved and commented upon in the monasteries. As Robert Linrothe notes in his study of the development of Esoteric imagery in eastern India, "by the late tenth or early eleventh century, texts such as the

Hevajra Tantra and the *Chandamaharoshana Tantra* feature a wrathful deity as the enlightened exponent of truth, answering the questions of his consort as they embrace."[29] (See cat. nos. 2, 32, 40, 43.) The contrast with earlier Mahayana literature, in which the historical Buddha preaches to an assembly of bodhisattvas, could not be greater (cat. no. 10).

Much Esoteric imagery includes deities portrayed in sexual embrace, meant to convey the ecstatic nature of enlightenment (fig. 3). The sexual aspect of this imagery also alludes to the integrative process that lies at the heart of Tantric practice: male and female are symbols of the countless pairs of opposites (love and hate, good and evil) that are experienced in mundane existence.

Esoteric iconography also includes a vast array of multiheaded gods and goddesses with limbs bearing symbols that suggest powerful forces in realms beyond time and space. The viewer cannot but be moved by the extraordinary iconography of the One-Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara (cat. no. 12), the embodiment of compassion, whose outstretched arms form a wide halo encircling his body (fig. 4). The palm of each hand has an eye; these multiple limbs with their perceptive powers suggest Avalokiteshvara's power to see the suffering of sentient beings in all realms and to provide effective assistance to alleviate their suffering.

Much Esoteric imagery includes wrathful deities bearing symbols associated with death and violence (for example, skulls, skull cups filled with blood, severed heads, and other ornaments made from human bones; see cat. nos. 14, 20, 31, 44). The wrathful aspects of Esoteric imagery can be understood as visual metaphors for the inner states that keep one from enlightenment: anger, greed, passion, and ignorance. They embody all the inner afflictions that darken our thoughts, our words, and our deeds and that prohibit attainment of the Buddhist goal of full enlightenment. When they are recognized as aspects of one's self, to be tamed by spiritual practice, these fearsome figures are no longer perceived as terrifying.

Tantric texts often associate specific deities with obstacles to enlightenment; one group of deities is referred to as *krodha vighnantaka* (wrathful destroyers of obstacles). They are portrayed as horrifying, full of wrath and frightening in appearance. Their hair stands on end; their teeth are bared; their eyes are red with fury and rage; their crowns are adorned with skulls; they wear fearful ornaments of bone and other symbols associated with death and destruction. As Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann has explained, their purpose is to dispel all the obstacles that hinder one's attainment of full enlightenment.[30] Achala (cat. no. 22) is a *krodha vighnantaka*, and groups of them appear in mandalas (see cat. no. 47), where they are also meant to serve in a protective role.

Esoteric imagery was used by Tantric practitioners as an aid to visualization in the early stages of meditation. Initiates studied the appearance of the deity—its peaceful or wrathful guise, the elements of its iconography—until he or she was able, within a meditative state, to visualize the deity. A text such as the *Sadhanamala* (A Garland of Means for Attainment)—a Sanskrit compendium of iconographic descriptions from about the eleventh century that was translated into Tibetan—tells the reader again and again to "meditate [on] himself as [the deity]."[31] Iconographic details necessary for vivid contemplation of the deity (the number of arms, legs, and associated symbols) are all clearly described. During this practice of evoking a deity from within, known sometimes as *sadhana* (means for attainment), the initiate slowly strengthens his ability to create an internal image of the deity, an image held firm in all its complexity during long periods of meditation. Meditation and visualization allow access to deep layers of the subconscious, which powerfully shapes our reality. According to Esoteric theory, until one is enlightened, these subconscious predispositions and per-



Figure 4. Eleven-Headed, One-Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara, detail. Central Tibet, mid-12th century. Distemper on cloth. Private collection (cat. no. 12)

ceptions are distorted by greed, passion, ignorance, blind attachment, and hatred; the purpose of visualization is to fully recognize these unfortunate psychological distortions and to lessen their grip on one's body, speech, and mind. The initiate gradually becomes identified with the deity through his meditative vision in a spiritual process that transforms his perceptive powers, and he integrates these powers with the wisdom associated with the deity.

The historical Buddha Shakyamuni was represented both as the historical founder of the faith (cat. nos. 10, 16) and as one of many Buddhas past and future. A common group of five celestial Buddhas known as Tathagatas (an epithet of the historical Buddha, "he who has thus gone" or "he who has gone into suchness") includes Akshobhya, Amitabha (cat. no. 23b), Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 23c), Ratnasambhava (cat. no. 23a), and Vairochana (cat. nos. 9, 13). Each reflects aspects of Shakyamuni's enlightened qualities, and some can be associated with an important event in the life of the historical Buddha. Thus, Akshobhya (the Unshakable) illustrates the moment at Bodh Gaya when the historical Buddha called the earth to witness his right to enlightenment; he also signifies the absolute resolve to attain enlightenment, which all advanced bodhisattvas possess.

Thus, in an Esoteric Buddhist context, imagery becomes part of the skillful means (*upaya*) by which one moves toward enlightenment. The five Tathagatas are a good example of the psychological transformation said to come about through visualization practices (see cat. nos. 23, 36).[32] Each Buddha is associated with one of the five afflictions (*panchakleshas*) of the human personality: Vairochana with delusion (*moha*), Akshobhya with pride (*mana*), Amitabha with envy (*irsya*), Ratnasambhava with hatred (*dvesha*), and Amoghasiddhi with desire (*raga*).[33] These characteristics obscure our true nature, but they can be transformed through spiritual practice into the wisdom of the Tathagata with whom they are associated: delusion becomes the pristine cognition of the expansiveness of reality (*dharmadhatujnana*); pride becomes the pristine cognition of sameness (*samatajnana*); envy becomes the pristine cognition of accomplishment (*krtyanusthanajnana*); hatred becomes mirrorlike pristine cognition (*adarshajnana*); desire becomes the pristine cognition of discernment (*pratyavekshanajnana*).[34] The leaf from a Buddhist ritual crown from about the twelfth century (cat. no. 9) was probably worn in one of these rites of transformation.

Eastern Indian medieval art was closely associated with a sophisticated literary tradition and often presented deities within richly symbolic settings, as a remarkable eleventh-century eastern Indian medieval sculpture of Manjuvajra's mandala reveals (fig. 5). On the simplest level, this image portrays a deity within his temple. Viewed through the trilobed arch of the entrance, Manjuvajra sits on a double lotus base within the temple's inner sanctuary, the *garbha grha* (womb chamber). The Indian temple, both the dwelling of a deity and his cosmic form, is a setting of enormous symbolic significance; it is sometimes seen in early Tibetan paintings (cat. nos. 5, 6, 27, 37).

The *Nishpannayogavali* (The Garland of Perfection Yoga) is an Esoteric Sanskrit text compiled at Vikramashila monastery by Abhayakaragupta (act. late eleventh–early twelfth century), which consists of twenty-six chapters, each describing a different mandala used in Esoteric meditation practices.[35] Although



Figure 5. Manjuvajra Mandala. Eastern India, 11th century. Phyllite, h. 95 cm (37⅜ in.). Private collection

Abhayakaragupta does not specify his audience, the text's most likely readers were monks, who used the text's mandalas for visualization practices, and artists, who followed its detailed prescriptions to construct more permanent mandalas in works of art. It is clear, however, that the text is not simply an iconographic compendium, for it is rich in iconological information as well. The theme of the first chapter is the mystical process by which an individual directly perceives his chosen deity—in this instance, Manjuvajra.

In a manner that corresponds to a description in the first chapter of the *Nishpannayogavali*, this Manjuvajra mandala (fig. 5) disposes four figures in *stupas* around the central figure in an arrangement that represents a perfect square. The fifth figure, also in a *stupa*, is placed directly above Manjuvajra, forming the antefix (*shukanasa*, or parrot's beak) of a temple that rises up behind it. Were the *stupas* actually reconstructed, the arrangement would form a three-dimensional mandala, the outer *stupas* oriented to the four cardinal points of the compass. At the center of this mandala sits Manjuvajra, an Esoteric form of the Mahayana bodhisattva Manjushri, in the *vajraparyanka* (diamond seat) posture. Identified by his three faces and six arms, he holds the sword, an arrow, a blue lotus, and a bow (here, fashioned from a vegetal stem). The central pair of hands assumes the gesture known as *prajnalinganabhinaya*, signifying the embrace of (an invisible) consort.[36] The mandala, a plan both of the cosmos and of the essence of man, is another of the richly symbolic artistic themes from eastern India that Tibetans incorporated into their own painting tradition (cat. nos. 2, 45, 46, 47).

Indian *Pata* Painting

What of eastern Indian painting, the art form that probably had the most powerful influence on early Tibetan painting? Texts indicate that visiting Tibetans saw murals at Nalanda and Vikramashila monasteries.[37] Although not a single surviving cloth painting (*pata*) of this period can be indisputably attributed to eastern India, this art form is mentioned in eyewitness accounts, such as that of a twelfth-century Chinese pilgrim at Nalanda: ". . . there are made many paintings of Buddha, bodhisattvas and arhats, painted on Indian cloth. These Buddhist representations are different from those of China. . . . first the five mystic syllables are written on the reverse of the painting, and thereafter the picture is drawn in full colours on the obverse. They cover the canvas with a ground of gold or vermilion. They aver that cow's glue is too thick (for mixing the colours), therefore they use peach resin glue diluted with water in which willow branches have been soaked, which makes the pigments durable and bright."[38]

Sanskrit literature provides references to *patas* that shed light on this lost art and its parallels with Tibetan *thankas*. The *Manjushrimulakalpa*, translated into Tibetan in about 1060, describes large, medium, and small paintings and specifies that the painting field should be rectangular.[39] It also indicates the hierarchical nature of the *pata*'s composition and occasionally offers aesthetic guidelines. Marcelle Lalou, in summarizing her translation of the text, writes: "The principal figure is surrounded by assistants who are arranged symmetrically, or who are at least grouped with a sense of equilibrium."[40] The *Manjushrimulakalpa* also states that the sacrificer (*sadhaka*), who conducts rites associated with worship of the deity who dwells in the painting, is to appear in the bottom left or right corner of the painting, another feature of the Indian *pata* often seen in early Tibetan paintings of the eastern Indian style (see cat. nos. 2, 14, 19).[41]

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana* of about the seventh century distinguishes between sacred and narrative painting and notes that sacred painting is done "on an upright [rectangular] canvas . . . with subject matter derived from the world of the gods or any other [sacred] sphere. . . . The rules of ideal proportion are to be carefully followed."[42] Iconometric canons, which prescribe the measurements of each part of a deity, are discussed in texts such as the *Citralakshana*.[43] The purpose was to ensure that images would be rendered according to ancient aesthetic principles and that accepted norms of beauty would be observed.

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana* describes techniques of shading (*vartana*) an image in order to convey a sense of rounded forms in real space:[44] *patra vartana* (leaf shading) uses lines (*rekha*) of color; *bindu vartana* (shading by dot) is seen in the murals at Alchi in western Tibet (ca. 1200);[45] a subtle shading known as *ahairika* or *ahaivika*, translated as "wash" or "tone,"[46] is perhaps related to the lac that one finds in Tibetan painting (see Bruce-Gardner essay, below). Even burnishing, so common in Tibetan painting, is discussed as part of the preparation of the Indian *pata*.[47]

The *Samaranga Sutradhara* describes eight aspects of painting, all of which correspond with the major stages in the execution of a Tibetan work: brush (*vartika*); preparation(?) of the ground (*bhumibandhana*); outlining (*rekhakarma*); iconographic details (*lakshana*); blocking in color (*varnakarma*); plastic shading (*vartanakrama*); erasures(?) (*lekhakarana*); and second or final outline (*dvikakarma* or *dvicakarma*).[48] The

Citralakshana describes the feet of images painted red with lac, a common feature of Tibetan painting and seen in works throughout this catalogue.[49]

Whether Tibetans apprenticed themselves to Indian painters in order to learn the necessary practical skills remains unclear. However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that Tibetans commissioned works in eastern India, which they brought back to Tibet. An account of the life of the Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha (982–1054), written by the Tibetan historian Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa (1504–1566), provides insight into the circumstances whereby Indian paintings were commissioned for Tibet. Toward the end of his life and while in Tibet, Atisha had visions of Maitreya and Manjushri debating Mahayana doctrine. He sent a messenger to Vikramashila to arrange for the commission of three paintings: one illustrating his vision of Maitreya and Manjushri, another depicting the Mahabodhi, and a painting of Shadakshari Avalokiteshvara. The paintings were executed and sent to Tibet. Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa stated that in his day the three paintings were said to be at Nyethang monastery in central Tibet, which suffered serious damage during the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966–76.[50]

This account, then, suggests that Indian *patas* did make their way into Tibet. That not a single Indian cloth painting dating from the medieval period has yet come to light—despite the considerable literary evidence that they existed—reflects either the violent history of this fragile medium or the difficulty in distinguishing Indian cloth paintings from those of the still-growing corpus of early Tibetan *thankas*, whose primary inspiration was Indian painting. It is noteworthy that the survival of eastern Indian Buddhist manuscripts has been attributed to their export and safekeeping in monasteries in Tibet and Nepal.[51] Jeremiah P. Losty, a leading authority in the field of Indian manuscripts, notes that manuscripts could be expected to survive no longer than one or two centuries in India's hot and humid climate, "with its attendant superfluity of voracious insects."[52] The same could be said of painting on cloth. This author



Figure 6. Wooden book cover with silver repoussé, partial gilding, and semiprecious stones, detail from a pair of covers.Central Tibet, commissioned in eastern India, ca. 11th–12th century. Entire cover, 22.5 x 70.5 cm (8⅞ x 27¾ in.). Private collection



Figure 7. Painted book cover. Tibet, ca. 13th century. Distemper on wood, 27 x 73 cm (10½ x 28¾ in.). Private collection

suggests that at least one painting in this catalogue—the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3)—might have been painted by an eastern Indian artist for a Tibetan patron, but it is possible that other such works will emerge in the future. Indeed, my colleague Steven M. Kossak will argue that several works here were created by Indian artists for Tibetan patrons (see p. 37, below).

A remarkable pair of gilt silver repoussé book covers provide further evidence that Tibetans commissioned works from eastern Indian artists (fig. 6). The style of the repoussé work is certainly eastern Indian, but the size of the covers does not reflect the narrow dimensions required by the palm-leaf books of eastern India.[53] However, the size corresponds closely to that seen in wooden book covers used for Tibetan translations of Sanskrit Buddhist texts during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For this reason and others discussed below, one may infer that the covers were produced by eastern Indian artists for Tibetans.

The repoussé images are eastern Indian, as is evident when they are compared with the many surviving examples of tenth- through twelfth-century sculpture from this region. Facial traits and body modeling are especially telling. The large, heavily hooded eyes with deeply incised pupils, the full lips and fleshy cheeks of Ashtamahabhaya Tara (the best preserved of the repoussé images) can be seen, for example, in an Avalokiteshvara bronze from Kurkihar of about the mid-tenth century, now in the Patna Museum.[54] Tara's fleshy torso, slightly rounded at the navel, is also very similar to that of Avalokiteshvara, and to other eleventh- and twelfth-century images from Kurkihar and from Fatehpur in the Gaya district of Bihar.[55] Other iconographic elements in these covers also have close parallels in eastern Indian art, for example, the beaded medallion and the foliate scrollwork (sometimes containing figures), marked by a beaded border.[56]

Eastern Indian medieval monasteries had brought the art of the book to great heights. Several hundred fragments of illuminated palm-leaf manuscripts and wooden covers survive; they are often exquisitely painted and carved, although—to my knowledge—no other example survives with repoussé adornment.[57] However, the style and many of the motifs in these repoussé covers can be found on eastern Indian carved and painted wooden covers. A pair of twelfth-century carved wooden covers, now in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, includes foliate scrolls issuing from the tails of two geese, very similar to those in this repoussé example.[58] Other twelfth-century eastern Indian painted covers show offering goddesses within scrolling vines, a motif reminiscent of that in the covers under discussion.[59]

The art-historical significance of these covers is especially apparent when one compares them with book covers produced by Tibetan artists between the twelfth and the fourteenth century (fig. 7). Eastern Indian works such as this inspired the style, composition, and motifs used in Tibetan painted and carved wooden covers, and the silver-and-gilt repoussé technique itself was sometimes simulated by Tibetan artists. This example of an object almost certainly produced by Indian artists for Tibet lends further credence to the hypothesis tendered by this author that the Ford Tara, too, was created by an Indian artist for a Tibetan patron.

The Demise of Indian Buddhism

One Tibetan's eyewitness account of his journey to eastern India from 1234 to 1236 provides tantalizing details of the final days of Indian Buddhism, as well as a rare account of the experiences of a pilgrim in

medieval India. Dharmasvamin's purpose in going to India was to visit Bodh Gaya, the site of the historical Buddha's enlightenment, and to study Buddhist texts with Indian masters. He reached eastern India while bands of Turkic soldiers under Iltutmish (r. 1211–36) still roamed the countryside in the aftermath of the devastating raids led by Ikhityar-ud-Din Muhammad between 1193 and 1204–5.

Vikramashila lay in ruins; its foundation stone had been tossed into the Ganges and its other stones used to build a mosque.[60] Odantapuri had been made the headquarters of Muslim command, and Nalanda was in ruins; less than a hundred monks were still in residence at its two surviving structures.[61] A local king, Buddhasena, continued to provide financial support for Nalanda's ninety-year-old abbot, Rahula Shribhadra,[62] who accepted Dharmasvamin as a student. The two, both being bilingual, translated Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan.

Dharmasvamin had learned the fundamentals of translation from his uncle while still in Tibet, using the *Mahavyutpatti*, the Sanskrit–Tibetan lexicon completed during the reign of Relpachen in the early ninth century. His mastery of Sanskrit was so great that at Bodh Gaya local people mistook him for an Indian, and it was only by showing the calluses on his feet, caused by the heavy boots required in the rugged Tibetan terrain, that he finally convinced the Indians that he was in fact a Tibetan.[63]

Dharmasvamin does not mention painting—a relatively fragile medium that would not easily have survived the terrible destruction of the Muslim raids—except to note murals depicting Tara and other deities on a perimeter wall at Nalanda.[64] Even when eastern India's monastic universities were largely in ruins, Dharmasvamin was able to witness the worship of Indian images by priests who performed daily offerings of sacrificial substances such as curds, milk, raw sugar, honey, and the like to images, which reflected traditional Mahayana practices. He recounted tales of images that had come to life and performed miraculous deeds such as speaking, providing religious instruction, giving their jewelry to the poor.[65] Of a wooden image said to have performed miraculous deeds, Dharmasvamin wrote: "When one prays to this wooden image ... and the notion arises that it is a real Buddha, then the image truly expounds the Doctrine.... But if one thought that it was a material thing, a fashioned image, then the blessing decreased.... [A]ccording to the *avadana* (instructions) of Atisha, when one beholds sacred images, they have to be considered to be the very Tathagata...."[66]

A sense of the immense effort involved in the introduction of Indian Buddhism and Buddhist art to Tibet can be gleaned from a passage summarizing the introduction of Indian Buddhist literature to Tibet, written by the historian of religions David Snellgrove:

> [It] involved many generations of [Tibetan] scholars in the enormous task of seeking out many thousands of texts in India, whether from great monastic centers such as Vikramasila or Odantapuri, or from the many smaller ones, ... or from individual teachers, especially tantric yogins, in their homes, or in inviting any renowned Indian scholars, who could be persuaded to come to Tibet to assist in the elucidation of the vast literature that had been acquired, and in the preparation of approved translations. It is scarcely conceivable that at any other time in the history of human civilizations such a wholesale importation of so vast a foreign religious culture was achieved in so short a time at such extraordinarily high scholastic standards.[67]

The Development of Painting Traditions in Central Tibet

Despite the desire of Tibetans to emulate Indian Buddhism, the vast cultural differences that existed meant that Tibetans could only, at best, adapt Indian Buddhism and its arts. The Tibetans' first task was to establish a monastic foundation for the faith, and the paintings in this catalogue were created in the milieu of this evolving monasticism.

The Yarlung dynasty, which had temporarily united Tibet's clans under Songtsen Gampo and his successors, never recovered from the disintegration that followed Lang Darma's death in 842. Tibet's feudal social structure continued with local lords controlling the land and its resources. Because no central authority monitored the growth of Buddhist institutions during the Chidar, Tibet's religious institutions developed haphazardly. It soon became clear that in building monastic institutions Tibetans had to resolve several concerns: to determine the institutional role of the spiritual teacher and to ensure the purity of his teachings; to establish rules of spiritual succession whereby a master's spiritual teachings and, increasingly, the material wealth he controlled in his monastery passed smoothly from one generation to the next; and, finally, to establish a sound economic foundation for these institutions.

As will be explained in greater detail below, these concerns shaped early Tibetan painting in profound and sometimes unexpected ways. Thus, while Tibetan artists conscientiously adopted iconographic, iconometric, and aesthetic canons from eastern India (and, from the thirteenth century onward, aesthetic canons from Nepal as well), many central Tibetan paintings of the Chidar also reflect the particular concerns of their growing religious communities. Per-

haps one quarter of Tibetan paintings from before 1450 are portraits of hierarchs, evidence of the prominence spiritual leaders enjoyed in the emerging Buddhist culture of Tibet. Spiritual lineages also became a dominant theme in painting, and series of masters and disciples appear in the top, side, and bottom registers of most Tibetan paintings after 1200, with rudimentary lineages often appearing in earlier works as well. These lineages were meant to illustrate the link between a teacher and an unbroken line of respected spiritual authorities, whose roots, ideally, derived from the much revered Indian masters.

The peripatetic nature of Tibet's early Buddhist communities might well have slowed the development of indigenous schools of painting. However, by the early fifteenth century, Tibetan Buddhism had grown into four main orders, the Nyingma, Kagyu, Kadampa (which became the Gelukpa in the fifteenth century), and Sakya, each firmly rooted in monastic institutions and closely associated with powerful clan rulers who provided protection and patronage. Tibetan painting flourished as never before, producing such magnificent works as the Dancing Ganapati (cat. no. 49) and heralding Tibetan painters who were renowned in their own time as great artists. Throughout the Chidar, painting seems to have functioned in Tibet much as it did in India: for use in visualization practices, as icons through which a devotee communicated with the divine, and as aesthetic adornments in religious sanctuaries.

Early Efforts to Establish a Monastic Foundation for the Faith

In their efforts to establish a monastic foundation for Buddhism, Tibetans were greatly assisted by one of the finest Indian proponents of the faith, Atisha (982–1054), who finally agreed to visit Tibet after a number of urgent invitations from the western Tibetan rulers Yeshe O and his son, Changchub O. That Tibetans succeeded in so persuading this senior hierarch of Vikramashila monastery, then at the height of his career, is a testament to the power of their religious zeal. He ventured north in 1042, initially intending to stay only briefly, but ultimately he spent about two years in Nepal and western Tibet and approximately ten in central Tibet, where he died in 1054.

Atisha traveled in central Tibet with his chief Tibetan disciple, Dromton (1004–1063), and a small entourage, visiting hermitages and monasteries, where he gave lectures and private instruction to local practitioners. At Samye monastery, Atisha and the Tibetan Naktsho (b. 1011) translated Indian Buddhist texts into Tibetan; Atisha found an excellent collection of Sanskrit texts there, some of which were even then difficult to find in India.[68]

Throughout his travels, Atisha taught Mahayana and, occasionally, Tantric doctrines, for he believed that Esoteric teachings were too advanced for most Tibetans at this time. Atisha advised Tibetans to establish a firm monastic foundation for the faith, but recognizing that this would take time, he encouraged them to commit themselves to a properly trained spiritual teacher. In his *Lamp for the Path and Commentary*, written specifically for Tibetan Buddhists, he states:

> ... without holy men [for guidance]
> One will altogether go astray.
> Therefore, an intelligent person
> Wins the favor of a guru, and
> Asks for the right personal guidance which
> Is in accord with the guru-tradition.[69]

Tibetans took this advice seriously, and the guru, or lama, assumed great power in the developing monasticism of Tibet, as will be explained below. When Atisha died, Dromton "took into his service all whom the Master used to support ..."[70] In 1056 local chiefs invited Dromton to Reting, approximately sixty miles north of Lhasa, where he founded a monastery to perpetuate Atisha's teachings. Sixty monks were resident there during Dromton's period as abbot, and even during his lifetime they called themselves "Kadampas" (Adherents of Verbal Advice); this nomenclature refers to the importance of maintaining the purity of oral teachings.[71]

In founding the monastery at Reting, the Kadampas were not alone. Certainly, dozens—if not hundreds—of centers of Buddhist study were founded during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including Shalu (1027), Yemar (ca. 1037), Reting (1056), Sakya (1073), Drathang (1081), Kyangbu (ca. 11th century), Narthang (1153), Densatil (1158), and Taklung (1180); it is likely that some of these communities commissioned *thankas* for a variety of purposes. Unlike murals, which establish a fairly permanent iconographic record, *thankas* could be commissioned to carry an endless array of iconographies that would reflect the needs of individual or communal practice. Thus, one might commission the portrait of a teacher, a spiritual lineage, a current meditational deity, or a large cycle of deities associated with current study. When no longer needed or appropriate, these works could be rolled up and placed in storage.

About twenty *thankas* survive from the eleventh and twelfth centuries; it is impossible to determine how accurately these works reflect the number of paintings actually produced during this time. The

extraordinarily large and impressive Shakyamuni Buddha of the late twelfth century (cat. no. 16) was possibly commissioned for one of these early sanctuaries, whereas inscriptions on the diminutive Portrait of a Lama (cat. no. 5) suggest that the Buddhist monk Chen Nga Tshultrim Bar (1038–1108) placed it in his residence. Newly uncovered inscriptions on the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3) suggest that it was associated with Reting monastery at some point in its history, probably before being reconsecrated by Sechilpuwa (1121–1189) and brought to Chilbu monastery, where it hung opposite a protector deity. Two figures in the painting are probably historical: the Indian Buddhist master Atisha and his chief Tibetan disciple, Dromton, the founder of Reting. This highly sophisticated work, which so perfectly embodies the eastern Indian medieval aesthetic and iconographic canons, may have been commissioned from an Indian artist for Reting.

There certainly were Tibetan painters active during this period, as is evident from inscriptions in the murals at Yemar (ca. 1037), signed by a painter named Gyaltsen or Gyaltsendrak,[72] and from occasional mention in early historical accounts. The Tibetan historian David Jackson has recently suggested that many of the early painters mentioned in Tibetan texts were revered Buddhist hierarchs who learned the art of painting as part of their Buddhist training. *Silpavidya* (the science of arts and crafts) was one of the five major branches of Indian Buddhist knowledge and formed an essential part of the curriculum in Indian monasteries, with which Tibetan students would have been familiar. *Silpavidya* texts included iconometric treatises such as the *Sambuddhabhashita Pratibimba Lakshana Vivarana* (Characteristics of Images as Taught by the Perfect Buddha), which outlined the iconometric proportions of figures so that they could be properly visualized in meditation. These and similar works were translated into Tibetan and formed a discrete section in the Tibetan Buddhist canon.[73]

The famed Kagyu master, Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170), known for his role in the development of the Kagyu order, was "chief secretary and painter" to his teacher, Khenpo Dingge Tshultrim Bar.[74] Two well-known Sakya theologians, Sonam Tsemo (1142–1182) and Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) are also said to have painted,[75] and Rinchen Sangpo (958–1055), instrumental in the introduction of Buddhism to western Tibet, is said to have presented some of his paintings for Atisha to admire.[76] Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (1182–1251), about whom more will be said below, was known to be a gifted painter. Murals of great aesthetic quality at Sakya monastery were attributed to him; they survived until the 1960s.[77] Despite these intriguing clues, we have little information about the painters who created the works in this exhibition catalogue, so that even their specific cultural identity—Tibetan, Indian, Newari, for example—is often difficult to determine.

Although relatively little is known about the artists themselves, something is known of the historical figures who appear in the paintings in this catalogue as well as of the patrons and the system of patronage that developed within Tibet's monasticism. As early as the eleventh century, aristocratic families sought prestige by association with the Buddhist orders. In 1073 the Khon family founded monasteries at Sakya, not far from where their allies in the Che family had founded Shalu in 1027. At the turn of the fifteenth century, the Phakmo Dru clan, which had become immensely powerful in Tibet, supported the emerging Gelukpa order.

Tibetan Buddhism is known for its four main orders, but in the period under consideration there was great diversity within the developing groups. Individuals studied with many teachers of various associations, and the distinctions between these nascent groups were not always clear. There arose what might be described as a "cult of personalism"; great emphasis was placed not upon schools or institutions but upon individual teachers and their particular spiritual lineages.

During the late eleventh and the twelfth century, many small religious communities arose, each led by a charismatic figure who was often famed for his expert knowledge of a specific text or group of texts. Such individuals were the driving force behind Buddhism and its institutions: they founded monasteries, attracted disciples, and propagated their own versions of the faith. The future of such a religious institution depended upon the leadership qualities of the founder, the extent of his material resources, his political connections, and the manifold skills of his successors.

Personal jealousies and rivalries between groups were common. There were also rivalries within groups; antagonisms often developed in the aftermath of a teacher's death, because most groups had no clear rules for the transmission of religious authority. When a charismatic leader died, his disciples usually dispersed, and many subsequently founded their own institutions. This process depleted the resources available for building a firm, rational monastic system, and it fostered debilitating competition among groups and individuals within groups. These trends can be seen in the development of the Kagyu order, inspired by the traveling scholar and translator Marpa (1012–1097). Marpa is said to have first met Atisha during one of his two journeys in India,[78] but he was drawn

to the Indian Tantric practitioner Naropa and became one of his greatest disciples. Fluent in Sanskrit, Marpa studied texts with various Indian sages: the *Hevajra Tantra* with Naropa, the *Guhyasamaja Tantra* with Jnangarbha, and Mahamudra meditation practices with Maitripa.

The fifteenth-century Tibetan historian Go Lotsawa (1392–1481) describes Marpa's disciples as "too numerous to list," but the most famous was Milarepa (1040–1123), whose devotion to Marpa, even in the face of severe tests of moral endurance, is well known even in the West. Milarepa's own disciples included Rongchung-repa, Rechungpa, and Gampopa (1079–1153). Go lists dozens more, adding that his assessment is "... but a rough abridgement, for who will be able to give a complete list of the disciples of this great Venerable One [?]."[79]

Milarepa's most famous disciple was Gampopa, whose earlier training had been with the Kadampas.[80] He had many disciples, but the most interesting for our discussion is Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170). Preferring solitude to a monastic community, Phakmo Drupa settled in a grass hut along the Tsangpo River at Densatil, approximately a hundred miles southeast of Lhasa. Toward the end of his life, this gifted teacher attracted as many as thirteen hundred disciples.[81] When he died, his lineage splintered as competing groups led by rival disciples fought to legitimize themselves; each group leader vied to become Phakmo Drupa's prime successor.

Two protagonists in this drama were Drigungpa (also known as Drigung Dharmasvamin, 1143–1217) and Taklung Thangpa Chenpo (also known as Tashipel, 1142–1210), who became great rivals. Although Phakmo Drupa did not appoint a successor, Drigungpa eventually assumed the abbot's chair at Densatil in 1177, but left under duress two years later. Subsequently, Densatil was often without an abbot. In 1180 Tashipel made his way to Taklung, approximately forty miles north of Lhasa, where he established a small hermitage for himself and seventeen disciples. Here, he labored diligently for thirty years, and by the time of his death in 1210, his community had grown to encompass more than three thousand monks.[82] In 1198, Drigungpa and Tashipel built a temple over their former master's grass hut. This edifice housed Phakmo Drupa's famed library and other treasures of Densatil. When local people threatened to raid the monastery and take its valuable property, Drigungpa took much of its wealth "and kept it apart for the rebuilding of [Samye]"; he transferred its precious library to his own monastery at Gampo. Go Lotsawa suggests that this incident brought their rivalry to a head.[83]

Portraiture

More than eighty paintings have survived from the Taklung monastery; many are portraits, and these, together with portraits from other orders, reveal some interesting patterns. Giuseppe Tucci believed that portraits executed during the lifetime of the subject served as models for later portraits, although too little is known about the early works to determine whether Tucci's hypothesis reflects general practice before the fifteenth century.[84] However, some trends are clear. Portraits of hierarchs were commissioned during the subject's lifetime, just after his death, or long after his death.[85] Moreover, direct observation of the facial characteristics of the subject might have influenced some portraits, but the chief goal of the artist was to portray the subject as an enlightened being, and to achieve this, artists borrowed iconographic conventions that had been developed in India to depict Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

In particular, artists relied on characteristics known in India as *lakshana*, the external physical signs of an enlightened being. Indian treatises such as the *Mahavastu* describe the thirty-two great marks (*mahapurushalakshana*) and the eighty lesser marks (*anuvyanjanalakshana*) of an enlightened being. In the portrait of a Kagyu Hierarch (cat. no. 17), one finds some of these traits: elongated earlobes and images of wheels on the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands. In addition, the throne setting, which originated in India, is one typically seen in portrayals of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (for example, cat. no. 16). As Jeannine Auboyer has shown, this setting epitomizes the assemblage of natural and supernatural forces and their obeisance to the figure portrayed and is an arrangement of great symbolic significance.[86] The subject's teaching gesture (*dharmachakra mudra*) suggests his ability to convey the experience and wisdom associated with the enlightened state, commonly associated with deities such as Shakyamuni Buddha (cat. nos. 10, 16) or one of the five Tathagatas (cat. nos. 23, 36). The lavish use of gold on the Kagyu Hierarch (cat. no. 17) is another testament to the enormous value associated with the subject of this portrait.

When, in their renditions of cherished hierarchs, Tibetan artists borrowed the Indian iconographic conventions that were developed for the depiction of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, they did so because they often perceived their hierarchs as divinities. Tibetan literature is filled with references to teachers who were seen as deities, even as Buddhas. An extreme example of this phenomenon can be seen in the late-twelfth-century Vairochana and Attendants (cat. no. 13), where the figure of a teacher (probably Phakmo



Figure 8. Phakmo Drupa in the crown of Vairochana, detail from Vairochana and Attendants. Central Tibet, ca. 1150–1200. Distemper on cloth. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund 1989.104 (cat. no. 13)

Drupa) surmounts the crown of the deity (see fig. 8). It is not uncommon to find the image of a spiritual superior in the crown of an Esoteric Buddhist deity, but the portrayal of a human image in this position is an indication of the supreme spiritual power attributed to Tibetan teachers at this time.

Some portraits were thought to convey the spiritual presence of their subjects. It is clear from many references that Tibetans, upon seeing the portrait of a living teacher, were often so moved by the experience that they ventured forth to meet the teacher. Tashipel is said to have seen Phakmo Drupa's portrait and then felt "that he must go and meet his teacher."[87] Atisha is said to have requested of his Tibetan disciples that after his death they paint a life-size portrait of him.[88] He promised to return from the Tushita Heaven to consecrate it, and when implored by his disciple Ngok to do so, Atisha agreed that he would "enter into his own [painted] portrait image."[89]

Consecration of Paintings

Paintings were not considered to be complete until they were consecrated. Consecration ceremonies evoked the spirit of a deity or an historical person and therefore "installed" this spirit in the painting's cloth support. Thus empowered, such paintings enabled the devotee to have access to a deity for purposes of worship and communication. Inscriptions were normally written on the back of the painting during or just after the consecration ceremony. These include the mantras (*om, ah, hum*), usually placed behind the forehead, throat, and heart centers (*chakras*) of all deities portrayed on the painting's obverse. The inscriptions also recorded sacred creeds,[90] and sometimes they stated the name of the consecrator (or consecrators); other inscriptions simply state that the painting was consecrated many times.[91] The preponderance of evidence suggests that consecratory inscriptions are contemporaneous with the painting itself, and that they were written on the painting's reverse before the consecration ceremony was complete.[92]

In most Tibetan paintings of the eastern-Indian-inspired style, the lower left or right corner of the painting depicts a Tibetan monk seated before a table with instruments of ritual worship (fig. 9). More



Figure 9. Tibetan monk seated before ritual implements and offerings, detail from Portrait of Sangye Yarjon, Third Abbot of Taklung. Central Tibet, ca. 1250. Distemper on cloth. The Kronos Collections (cat. no. 19)

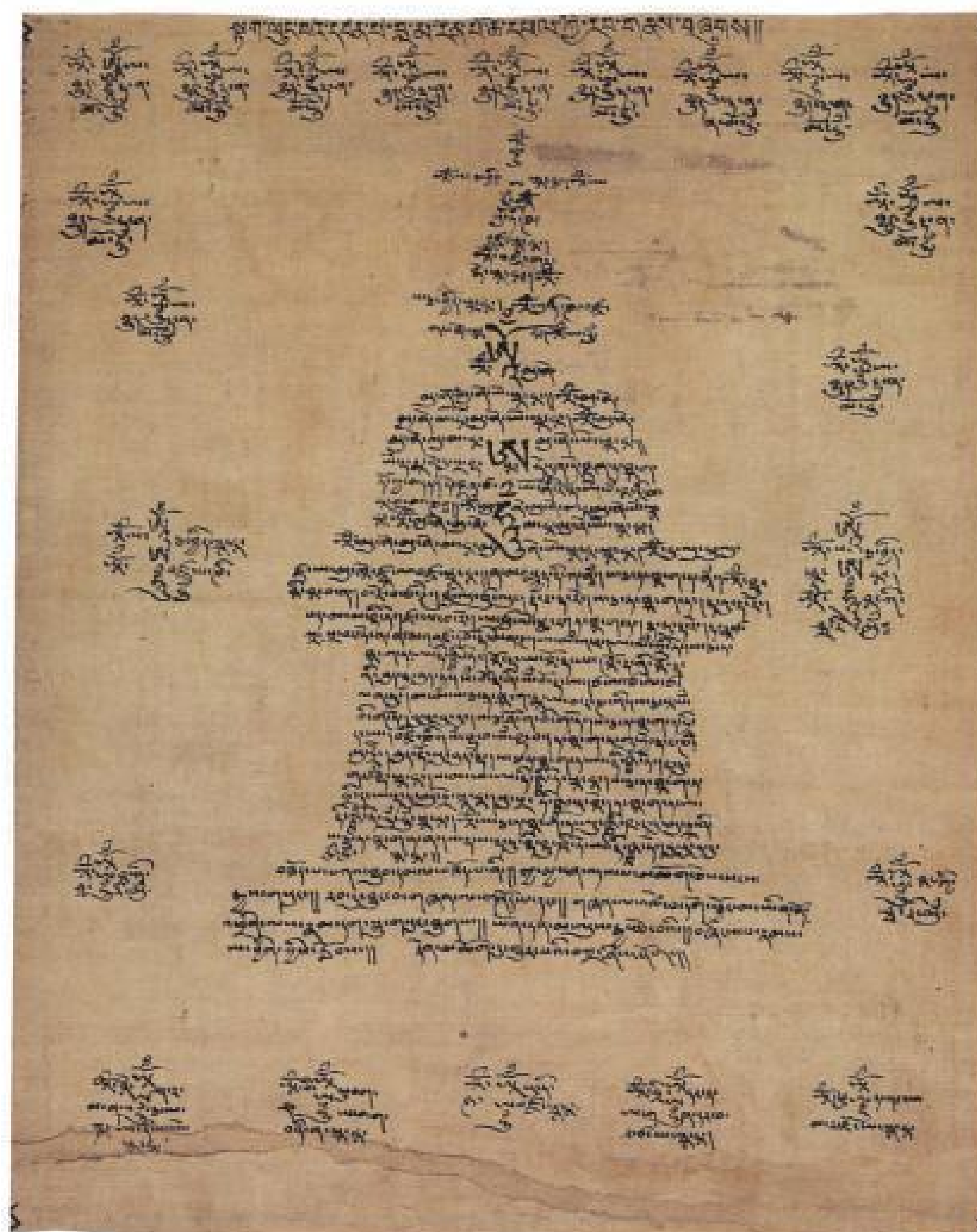


Figure 10. Inscription in the shape of a *stupa*, detail from verso of Seated Shakyamuni Buddha. Central Tibet, late 12th century. Distemper on cloth. Private collection (cat. no. 16)

research is needed to clarify the role—or roles—of such figures, who have sometimes been described as the painting's donor. The *Manjushrimulakalpa* identifies the figure in the painting's lower left or right corner as one who carries out sacrificial rites (*sadhaka*).[93] Tibetan informants have also described such figures as the painting's commissioner, because he instigates the creation of a painting for himself, his monastery, or for a monk or layperson under his care. Such figures are also said to have ensured that appropriate offerings were made to the painting after its consecration, in keeping with the widespread Buddhist and Hindu practice of offering food, water, incense, and other substances to consecrated images. As yet, little is known about this aspect of Tibetan painting, but it is interesting that this iconographic feature—which originated in eastern Indian art and can be seen, for example, on surviving stone stelae from that region—is rarely seen in Tibetan painting after the fourteenth century.[94]

The French scholar Anne Chayet notes that medieval Indian Sanskrit texts and their Tibetan translations often categorized works of art according to whether they corresponded to the enlightened body, speech, or mind of the Buddha. An image of a deity was thought to correspond to the Buddha's enlightened body; a text that recorded his teachings was thought to correspond to his enlightened speech; and shrines, especially a *stupa*, corresponded to the Buddha's enlightened mind.[95] Many early *thankas* symbolically incorporate all three categories in an intriguing manner: the deity or portrait on the front of the painting represents the body of enlightenment; consecration inscriptions (typically, mantras and brief Buddhist creeds) on the back represent enlightened speech; and the arrangement of these inscriptions in

the shape of a *stupa* indicates that they are intended to represent the enlightened mind of the Buddha (fig. 10).

Occasionally, an inscription on a painting will provide additional information about the work's early history. The Vajravarahi mandala (cat. no. 20) bears an inscription on the front stating that it is "the personal meditational image (*thugs dam*) of Onpo Lama Rinpoche of Taklung." The term *thugs dam*, an honorific term for *yi dam*, "chosen deity" (*ishtadevata* in Sanskrit), suggests that the painting was used by Onpo Lama Rinpoche to enhance those meditative visualizations that were associated with the teachings of Vajravarahi. Inscriptions on the back suggest that the painting was consecrated by each successive Taklung hierarch, beginning with Tashipel, and that it was handed down from teacher to disciple, a sacred relic made even more sacred by its association with a revered teacher.[96]

Spiritual Lineages and the Establishment of Rules for Spiritual Succession

Many paintings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries include abbreviated spiritual lineages, that is, images of teachers who are said to have experienced for themselves the mystical truths revealed by Shakyamuni Buddha over a millennium earlier, together with a disciple whom they guided along the same path. The late-twelfth-century Double Portrait (cat. no. 11) suggests this transmission of spiritual teachings from one generation to the next, with two enthroned monks facing each other, displaying gestures associated with religious discourse. This interpretation is strengthened by a work of about 1300 in the same genre (cat. no. 26), now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, which portrays Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170) and his disciple Tashipel (1142–1210), and which was part of a series of paintings illustrating the transmission of Buddhist doctrine from one authorized teacher to another of the next generation.

Portraits often include the subject's spiritual lineage in the top, side, or bottom registers, and this element was a crucial part of the subject's identity. Thus, in the portrait of Tashipel of about 1200 (cat. no. 18), one finds the spiritual progenitors of his branch of the Kagyu order placed directly above him: the celestial progenitor Vajradhara, the Indian yogin Tilopa (act. late tenth–early eleventh century), his Indian disciple Naropa (956–1040), followed by his Tibetan disciple Marpa (1012–1097), his disciple Milarepa (1040–1123), the latter's disciple Gampopa (1079–1153), and his disciple Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170). It is interesting that this lineage, though generally correct, masks a more complex historical truth. Although no *thankas* associated with Drigungpa are known to have survived, murals in the Three-tier Temple at Alchi include a lineage that is essentially the same as this one, except that Drigungpa rather than Tashipel is depicted as Phakmo Drupa's spiritual heir.[97]

Such uncertainties underscore the importance of unambiguous succession of religious authority. Had leaders such as Phakmo Drupa specified roles in clearly delineated hierarchies, skirmishes such as that between Tashipel and Drigungpa would have been less common. When Tashipel became aware of his approaching death, he assigned responsibility for the care of the monastery to two of his disciples: Changseng and Kuyal Rinchengon (1191–1236).[98] The abbot's seat was filled by the latter, who was a member of Tashipel's own clan. Although chosen by Tashipel for the post, Kuyal Rinchengon did not automatically receive the allegiance of the Taklung monastic community. When this young leader assumed the abbot's chair in 1210, the monks, who had promised not to disperse, "walked off without listening (to him). The monastic cells fell into ruin, and only about 700 monks remained."[99] But Kuyal was diligent. He became famous for curing the sick and performing miracles—in effect, for exercising the charismatic powers expected of successful monastic leaders. Go Lotsawa indicates that Kuyal's teachings very closely followed those of Tashipel: "He did not add (new) precepts, and did not alter even a single word in the texts of prayers and solemn wishes (*smon lam*)."[100] His disciples grew in number to nearly five thousand.

Kuyal Rinchengon is described as a particularly able administrator, overseeing a building program at Taklung, which included the construction of a large temple. He also increased Taklung's economic resources: "When he first occupied the abbot's chair, he owned not more than seven loads of barley.... Later, all the rooms of his [dwelling] ... became filled with gold, silver, silks, etc. The outside (precincts) of the monastery were filled by thousands of yaks and horses. The saying that 'one was unable to rival even a dog of [Taglungpa]' originated in his time."[101]

The early history of the Kagyus, like that of the other three main developing orders in Tibet—the Nyingma, the Kadampa, and the Sakya—reveals that no clear organization prevailed. Many of Marpa's disciples attracted their own followers and set up small hermitages or larger monasteries; some of these establishments succeeded in surviving to the following generation, but most did not. The vast majority of even Marpa's disciples studied with many teachers of various "sectarian" affiliations. Thus, during the early cen-

turies of the Chidar, despite Atisha's advice, it was the exception—not the rule—for disciples to bond to a single master. It was not unusual for aspirants to have as many as seventy teachers, located in different regions of Tibet.[102] This meant that many early Tibetan Buddhists followed a fluid, peripatetic course of study.

However, as monasteries became powerful and had more wealth to protect, abbots recognized the value of a clear and unambiguous line of succession. When these establishments had weak rulers or none at all, their material possessions became vulnerable—as in the case of Phakmo Drupa's library at Densatil, threatened by the local populace and then expropriated by Drigungpa. Moreover, some teachers desired a more stable environment for the perpetuation of the doctrines they had labored to inculcate. From among their many disciples, masters began to cultivate the few who seemed most able to preserve their teachings. As the thirteenth-century Kagyu monk Nyelpa Sungchepa was told by his teacher Ngamzongpa: "Those who are able to preach the Tantra are very few, therefore you should give the complete instruction to only one suitable person, who will be able to continue the lineage."[103] So, by the thirteenth century, it became increasingly clear that religious communities had to create a pattern of succession whereby charismatic leaders could successfully transmit their teachings and their temporal power from one generation to the next, thus providing firm economic, social, and political foundations for their institutions.

Some groups found ways to ensure that religious authority remained within the abbot's clan. In so doing, they followed an ancient system whereby a nephew inherited the family wealth through his paternal uncle.[104] The Sakya order, founded in 1073, had adopted this pattern and, to a lesser extent, it was also observed by some Kagyu groups, such as the monks at Taklung. The Karmapa group, a branch of the Kagyu order, may have been the first to initiate a mode of institutional succession based on the notion of reincarnation. T. V. Wylie has argued that the Karmapas invented the idea of institutionalized reincarnation to ensure continuity in their rule and to eliminate the debilitating sibling rivalry that inevitably plagued biological succession. Most importantly, institutionalized reincarnation would depersonalize the succession process, facilitating, in Wylie's words, the "transition from charisma of person to a charisma of office."[105] The third Karmapa, Rangchung Dorje (1284–1339), predicted the place of his future reincarnation and proclaimed his identity with his predecessor, Karma Pakshi.[106] Thus, it became traditional that a Karmapa, when near death, would prophesy his own rebirth. His attendants would follow clues to discover a newborn infant who exhibited characteristics of the master. The infant was then taken to the dead leader's seat and taught to assume his responsibilities.

The Karmapas' brilliant scheme incorporated the earlier practice of allegiance to an inspired leader with the all-important loyalty to an institution. Their view was that a charismatic individual may be reborn again and again, each time destined to serve the same role. Institutionalized reincarnation differed from simple reincarnation, which is mentioned throughout early Tibetan literature in reference to individuals as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Institutionalized reincarnation involved the reappearance soon after death of an historical person, in the form of an infant recognized as the reincarnation of the deceased.

Portraits of the fourteenth century and later tend to place less emphasis on delineating the subject's precise spiritual lineage; instead, they include many of his teachers, some disciples, and others who might have been important to him. Thus, the Portrait of Kunga Nyingpo (1092–1158; cat. no. 51) of the early fifteenth century—probably part of a series depicting important Sakya hierarchs—includes eighteen of his own teachers. This suggests that once the crucial issue of spiritual succession had been settled, great freedom and catholicity were possible.

Ties with Nepal and China: The Development of a Second Main Style in Central Tibet

In eastern India, Tibetans had found a model for Buddhism and Buddhist art that served as a cornerstone for Tibetan painting. The central Tibetan style that was inspired by eastern India had lost its vigor by the end of the thirteenth century, although it could still be seen in paintings throughout the fourteenth century. After the demise of Indian Buddhism, Tibetans increasingly relied on the artistic communities of the Kathmandu Valley, which became the source of the second major painting style in central Tibet during the Chidar. Nepal provided gifted artists with a distinctive aesthetic tradition, who were eager to undertake commissions in Tibet. Ancient cultural ties between Tibet and Nepal were secured by commerce, a shared Buddhist faith, and geographic proximity. Lumbini, the site of the historical Buddha's birth, is contained within Nepal's modern borders, and many temples in Nepal were frequented by Tibetan pilgrims and teachers during journeys to and from India and, after Indian Buddhism's demise, as destinations in themselves.

During the thirteenth century, spearheaded by the Sakya order, Tibet forged close relations with the powerful Mongol rulers of China, an association that had considerable impact on Tibet and Tibetan painting in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Tibet had managed to keep the Mongols at bay during the reign of Genghis Khan (ca. 1162–1227), but when he died, the Tibetans discontinued their payment of tribute. In 1240 Genghis's grandson Godan sent thirty thousand men into Tibet in a show of force. They burned Reting monastery, the Kadampa seat north of Lhasa; local villages were also looted.[107] The Sakya hierarch Kunga Gyeltsen (1182–1251), known as Sakya Pandita because of his fluency in Sanskrit, arrived at the Mongol prince's court in 1247 and sought a political solution to the Mongol threat. A man of unusual spiritual and political gifts, Sakya Pandita succeeded in securing de facto sovereignty for Tibet in exchange for his spiritual counsel and generous tribute. He arrived at the Mongol court in Liangzhou in 1247 and remained in China until his death in 1251.

Tibet now provided inspiration and guidance for Buddhists abroad. In 1247 Sakya Pandita became the personal religious adviser to Godan Khan, a role later assumed by his nephew Phakpa (1235–1280) with Khubilai Khan. Phakpa wielded considerable power both at the Yuan court and within Tibet itself. Lavish gifts came to Sakya monastery from the grateful Khan; a thousand silver ingots and fifty-nine thousand bolts of silk are mentioned in one ceremonial gift to Phakpa.[108]

When, in 1260, Khubilai Khan requested that a *stupa* reliquary be built in memory of Sakya Pandita, Phakpa sought artists from Nepal. In 1261, eighty Nepalese artists arrived at Sakya monastery, headed by the precocious sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Aniko (1245–1306), who became one of the leading artists of his day.[109] After two years at Sakya, Phakpa encouraged Aniko to accompany him to the Mongol court. There, Aniko became chief court painter and enjoyed a highly distinguished career; a school of Yuan painting, textiles, and sculpture reflects his Himalayan roots. As the Italian scholar Roberto Vitali has shown, when the Shalu prince Drakpa Gyeltsen wanted to renovate Shalu monastery, he went to the Mongol court in 1306, returning in 1307 with an entourage of artists trained by Aniko at the Yuan court. Their magnificent work can still be seen on the walls of Shalu.[110] Such incidents reveal the importance of patronage by powerful princes and clan rulers, who played an active role in securing artists and establishing aesthetic standards.

Buttressed by its favor at the Mongol court, the Sakya order enjoyed political power in Tibet for nearly a century, during which time Nepalese and Chinese elements of style became increasingly apparent in central Tibetan painting. A painting of Virupa here (cat. no. 35) bears an inscription stating that it was consecrated by Sakya Pandita, which probably occurred between 1216 (when he became the Sakya hierarch) and 1244, the year he left central Tibet for China. This painting is one of the earliest central Tibetan paintings inspired by the distinctive aesthetic traditions of the Kathmandu Valley. Sakya hierarchs developed close links with the Newari painters of Nepal and offered patronage to them, as another important style of Tibetan painting developed during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of the finest examples of this style, described by Steven M. Kossak in the following essay, are reproduced in this catalogue (cat. nos. 35, 36, 37, 47).

The power of the Sakyas had grown to be so formidable toward the end of the thirteenth century that the Drigungpas, having observed the Sakya success under Mongol patronage, sought their own patron in Khubilai Khan's estranged cousin, Khaidu, Khan of the Ilkhan dynasty, who agreed to become their patron. When Drigung and Sakya monks fought one another in 1285, each group was empowered by its respective patrons. The Sakyas triumphed, and Drigung monastery was burned in 1290.[111] Sakya monks also burned Densatil, Phakmo Drupa's seat, at about the same time.[112] Even the monks of Taklung, which was no small establishment at this time, sought assurances from Phakpa that their monastery would not be harmed. Khubilai Khan offered financial support to underwrite building projects at Taklung, and Go Lotsawa records that Khubilai Khan sent the Taklung hierarch Mangalaguru (chief hierarch, 1273–97) "six measures of gold" so that he could commission a gold Buddha at Taklung.[113]

However, when Khubilai Khan died in 1294, Mongol power declined. Subsequently, the power of the Sakya order in Tibet also diminished. In 1358, Sakya rulers were supplanted by the Phakmodru family, descendants of Phakmo Drupa of the Lang clan. Changchub Gyeltsen (1302–1364), formerly head of one of the thirteen Tibetan districts established under Sakya-Mongol hegemony, led his armies against the Sakya stronghold and toppled the unpopular rulers. Changchub Gyeltsen then dismantled the thirteen administrative districts, creating in their place numerous smaller districts, each governed by one of his loyal subjects. He and his successors held power for about a century, during which time they built nationalist sentiment, recalling the greatness of the period of the Yarlung dynasty kings. Peljor Sangpo, patron of the

masterwork Dancing Ganapati (cat. no. 49), was a leading figure in the administrations of Sonam Drakpa (1359–1418) and his successor, Drakpa Gyeltsen (1374–1432), both descendants of the great Changchub Gyeltsen (fig. 11).

Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) was founder of the Gelukpa school, initially known as the new Kadampas (acknowledging his debt to the eleventh-century reformer Atisha), and then as the Gelukpa (Adherents of the Virtuous Tradition). He improved monastic discipline, insisting on stricter interpretation of the Indian rules of monastic conduct (*vinaya*), including abstinence from sex, alcohol, and meat. The monasteries he founded were highly disciplined and included demanding curricula, rigid examinations, and strict hierarchies. In Giuseppe Tucci's words, Tsong Khapa "continued to restore the purest traditions of Indian monastic life."[114] Some princes of the Phakmo Drupa clan championed this rising Gelukpa school and became its patrons.[115]

Figure 11. The Patron Peljor Sangpo, detail from Dancing Ganapati. Central Tibet, ca. mid-15th century. Distemper on cloth. Private collection (cat. no. 49)

While some Tibetan Buddhists were forging alliances with powerful clans, other clerics continued to refine their understanding of the vast intellectual and spiritual traditions they had inherited from India. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were characterized by continued attempts to systematize the enormous literary legacy that had come to Tibet from India. The Indian Buddhist canon, known in Sanskrit as the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets, referring to the *vinaya*, or rules of monastic conduct; *sutras*, or the Buddha's own teachings; and *Abhidharma*, or commentaries), had been largely translated into Tibetan by the twelfth century, albeit haphazardly. In Tibet, it became known as the *Kanjur* (texts considered to be the Buddha's own teachings) and *Tanjur* (commentaries on the *Kanjur*). The Sakya hierarch Sonam Tsemo (1142–1182) proposed a system of classification of the Indian texts based on the difficulty of the practice described within them.[116] Later, Buton Rimpoche (1290–1364) at Shalu monastery expanded and strengthened this classification of Tantric texts, which divided Tantric literature into four main groups known as *kriyatantra* (action), *caryatantra* (performance), *yogatantra* (yoga),



and *anuttarayogatantra* (unsurpassed yoga). Each main category was further subdivided, based on distinctions unique to each category. Most important, Buton included in the Tibetan Buddhist canon only those texts whose Sanskrit originals were available for him to consult when approving the translation.

Information on art—mostly dealing with iconography and iconometry—was scattered throughout the Tibetan Buddhist canon. Iconometric texts include the *Pratibimbamana Lakshana* (The Characteristics of Measurements of Images), and the *Sambuddhabhashita Pratibimba Lakshana Vivarana* (The Characteristics of Images as Taught by the Perfect Buddha), the latter translated by Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) of Sakya monastery. After the fourteenth century, when the Tibetan Buddhist canon was well established and sufficiently available to a variety of monasteries, one sees mention of the literary sources for the iconography of particular Tibetan paintings. The paintings illustrating the mandalas in the Vajravali text (cat. no. 47), created at Ngor between 1429 and 1456, are excellent examples of this phenomenon.

These developments coincided with remarkable new developments in painting. Little is known about Tibetan artists of earlier centuries, but Tibetan literature describes three fifteenth-century painters known in their own lifetimes as outstanding artists: Tulku Chiu (fl. ca. 1410s–1430s?), Menthangpa Menla Dondrub (fl. 1450s–1470s or 1480s), and Khyentse Chenmo of Gongkar (fl. 1450s/60s–1470s or 1480s).[17] All three are said to have founded schools of painting, although their works—if any have survived—have yet to be identified.

Murals in the Kumbum of Gyantse, executed between about 1427 and 1442, are accompanied by inscriptions that cite twenty-nine master artists and also give the names of members of their ateliers, which were located throughout central Tibet. Franco Ricca calls this the "Gyantse school," heralding a truly Tibetan synthesis of the various foreign styles that had played an important part in the formation of Tibetan painting during the Chidar.[18] Several works in this catalogue may be described as closely related to the aesthetic achievements of the Gyantse school (cat. nos. 49, 53–55).

The remarkable paintings in this catalogue were produced in a culture and at a time very different from our own. This essay and the following essays—on style, by Steven M. Kossak, and on the practical techniques of painting, by Robert Bruce-Gardner—provide the reader with an intellectual framework by which to begin to appreciate early Tibetan painting. But whether or not one is intellectually prepared, these works have the power to move, to delight, to inspire the viewer. If one looks closely, one can see what Tibetans saw when they looked upon their gods.

The Development of Style in Early Central Tibetan Painting

Steven M. Kossak

Tibet, the "Roof of the World," was closed to Western eyes until the early twentieth century and thus acquired a mythic character. The reality was in some ways just as extraordinary. Tibet had been a great crossroad of culture from at least the seventh or eighth century, when it was one of the most important powers in Asia. Tibetans were part of a cultural matrix that included India, Kashmir (whose art was distinct from that of India), Central Asia, Nepal, and China. Buddhism became its dominant unifying force from about the eleventh century. From that period, Tibetan life and culture functioned as a medieval theocracy that had largely escaped the ravages of both civil war and external plunder. Until the Chinese invaded in 1950, Tibet had never been conquered, although internal rivalries had resulted in the destruction of some monasteries and the dispersion of their property.

The wealth of Tibetan monasteries was staggering. Many had been accumulating the gifts of pilgrims, monks, dignitaries, and potentates from as early as the eleventh century. This immense cultural legacy comprised not only indigenous creations but also foreign works that had been received as gifts. These included important textiles from China and manuscripts from India, both made of perishable materials that did not survive in their countries of origin; metal sculptures from Kashmir, India, and Nepal; and small stone sculptures from India. Tibetans also commissioned Nepalese and Indian artists to create works of art for them, and many of these became monastic property.

All of this was inexorably altered, beginning in the late nineteen-fifties, when the communist Chinese began to wipe out Tibetan Buddhist culture. Over the next twenty years, more than ninety percent of the Tibetan monasteries were destroyed, including many that had flourished since the eleventh or twelfth century. These establishments were not simply isolated buildings; often they were small medieval cities with numerous religious and secular buildings, some of which were very large. The architectural and artistic heritage—buildings, murals, statues, books, ritual implements, *thankas*, textiles, armor, and musical instruments—were largely eradicated. In some ways, this exhibition came about because of that calamitous disruption, which dislodged paintings from their historic locations. Many of the works displayed in this exhibition are a part of the legacies that somehow survived and ultimately found new homes in Western collections.

The problems facing the historian of Tibetan painting are manifold. The artistic record is fragmentary not only for Tibetan works but also for the works that provided the most important influences: paintings of the Pala period of eastern India (eighth–twelfth century) and Nepalese painting of the thirteenth century. Of the paintings that have come down to us from those cultures, chiefly manuscript illuminations, some are dated by inscription but few can be assigned a specific provenance. Moreover, most postdate comparable Tibetan works.

We have no way of assessing if the early *thankas*—paintings on cloth—and murals that have survived in Tibet necessarily offer a cross section of what existed. A large corpus of *thankas* has survived only from Taklung, one of the many great monasteries of the eleventh through the fourteenth century, and in only

a minority of cases are we able to establish that another of these institutions is the probable provenance of a specific painting. Although it is usually impossible to ascertain precisely where a *thanka* is from, in many instances one can determine the religious school for which it was produced. For example, a Sakya affiliation may be postulated but not necessarily one to Sakya monastery itself.

Because of the Tibetans' concern for documenting the transmittal of Buddhist doctrine from teacher to student, and from abbot to abbot, there is an abundance of information regarding historical figures of the eleventh through the fifteenth century. *Thankas* often have lineages that include deities, quasihistorical figures, monks, and abbots, all of which manifest this transfer through the centuries. When historical or quasihistorical figures can be recognized by their distinctive portrayals or because of inscriptions, the school or monastery from which a painting originated can often be ascertained.

The precise dating of paintings from Tibet is usually extremely difficult, since their inscriptions do not include this information. It is equally unusual for *thankas* to have inscriptions that allow them to be securely dated or associated with a particular school or monastery. Although we can often find historical information about the abbots portrayed as the central images in *thankas* (when inscriptions reveal their names), it is often unclear how to date them. The *Blue Annals* tells us that some portraits were certainly

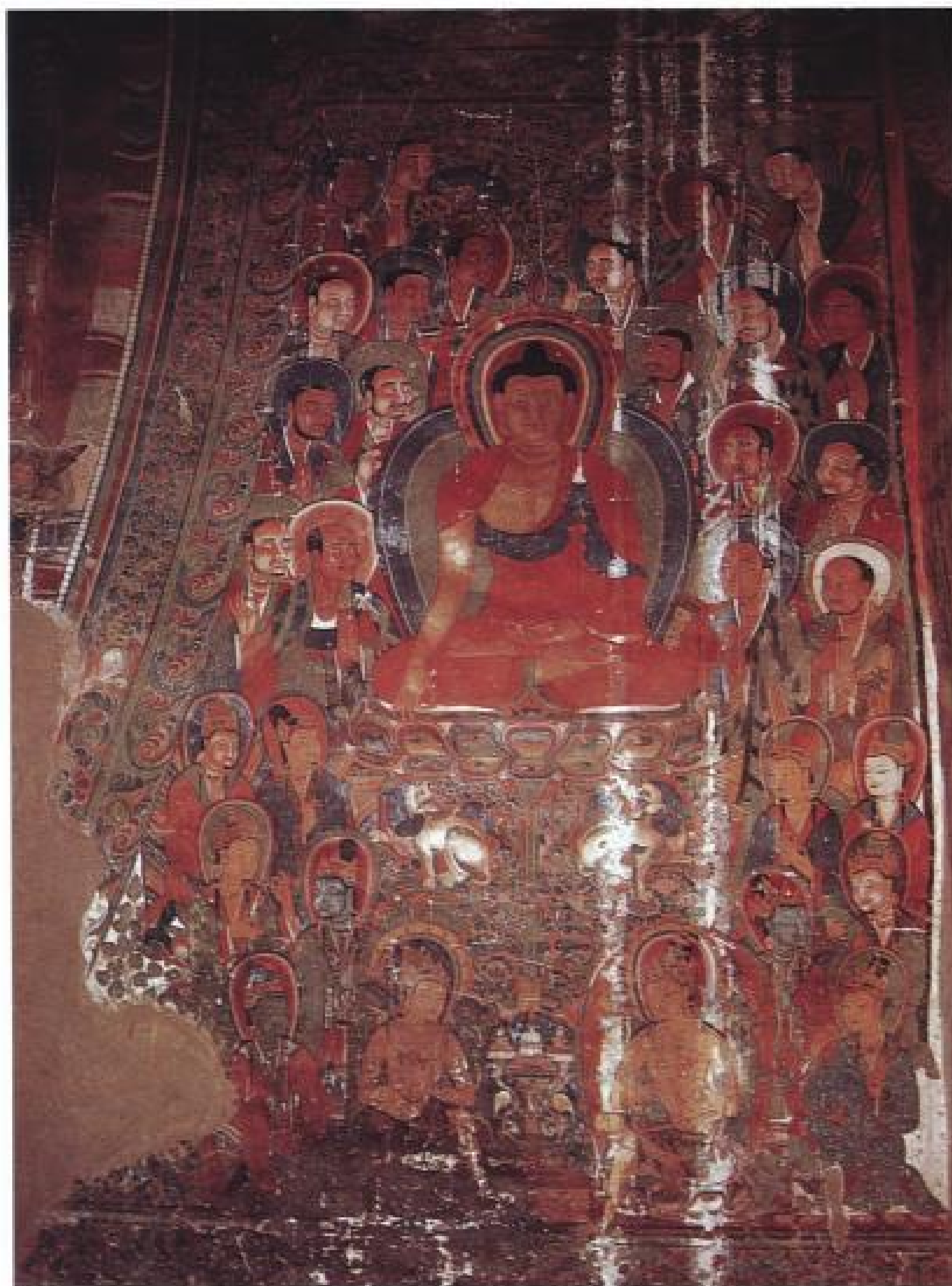


Figure 12. Mural with the worship of the Buddha. Tibet, Drathang Temple, late 11th century. From Vitali 1990, plate 29

executed during the lifetime of the sitter and that others are posthumous. In most cases connoisseurship rather than the written word must be used to make the distinction. This can be done on the basis of style, considerations of the lineage shown, and comparison with associated paintings and inscriptions. The length and the specific members of lineages form another clue to the date of a *thanka*. Although we can assume that the last abbot depicted in a painting was probably alive at the time it was made, in certain cases this has been shown not to be so. Although an inexact science, the analysis of style in relation to the few relatively securely datable *thankas*, together with these other factors, serves as our best means of establishing a chronology for the paintings.

The situation is particularly frustrating because, unlike that of any culture of similar date that can be studied, the historical fabric of Tibet was rent not in ancient times, but in our own. If we could go back a mere fifty years in time, it would be possible to look at paintings in storerooms, examine records in monasteries, and hypothesize more specifically about the existence of monastic or sectarian schools of painting. We could also trace the movements of *thankas* between religious centers and schools and possibly assess their relationships to murals, in terms of style and iconography. Now, we must rely on extremely fragmentary information to postulate about these issues.

All the paintings to be discussed are Buddhist; they stem from two traditions, the Mahayana and the Esoteric. In the Mahayana, the principal deities are the historical Buddha and bodhisattvas, who dedicate themselves to saving mankind. Also included are Tara, the Savioress; Prajnaparamita, Goddess of Transcendent Wisdom; and other Buddhas. Esoteric Buddhism was a later development in which members of an enlarged pantheon were visualized as interconnected and often portrayed in mandalas, series, or with their consorts in sexual embrace.

The painting of central Tibet comprises two major traditions: temple murals and portable paintings, mainly *thankas* (which could be rolled up and stored). The small number of pre-fourteenth-century surviving murals, mainly of the eleventh century, show an eclectic mixture of eastern Indian and Central Asian styles (mainly in the costumes) and are so diverse that they cannot be ascribed to a single school or artistic tradition. In most cases it is unclear whether the painters were natives or foreigners. The iconography of these murals derives mainly from Mahayana Buddhism. Within the temples, shrines were dedicated to the historical Buddha and to various bodhisattvas. At Yemar monastery (before 1037), now destroyed and known only from photographs, the murals varied greatly in quality from the artistically accomplished to folksy versions of an early eastern Indian style.[1] One of the Yemar murals had an inscription revealing that at least one Tibetan artist worked there.[2] Fragmentary murals in an eastern Indian style also survive at Shalu.[3] The finest, best preserved, and most complete extant murals are at the small temple of Drathang (ca. 1093; fig. 12).[4] These reveal a mixture of later, more linear eastern Indian and Central Asian styles, and their eclecticism is perhaps the most pronounced of the entire group. Only Kyangbu monastery had Esoteric imagery: a shrine was dedicated to the Tathagatas, a pentad of deities described in the Yoga Tantras, one of the basic texts of Esoteric Buddhism.[5]

The iconographies of these murals and of contemporaneous *thankas* do not bear much resemblance to one another, perhaps because they were created to serve very different functions. Murals chiefly formed backdrops for sculptures of Buddhas or bodhisattvas, which were the main images in the temples. Some of the murals portray elaborate paradise scenes that form complete compositions, whereas others depict only rows of deities or attendant bodhisattvas. In contrast, *thankas* are intrinsically primary objects of devotion and show principal deities surrounded by attendants; they are always structured in a hierarchical manner. However, their size perhaps dictates that when paradise scenes occur, they contain many fewer figures than those in murals (cf. fig. 12 and cat. nos. 4, 7). The most important correspondence between the murals and some early *thankas* is the presence in each of Tibetan donor figures and attendants with similar costumes and hairstyles that probably reflect current fashion.

The eleventh century was also a period of stylistic eclecticism in *thanka* painting. A small group of works seems to be based on early Pala styles; they are akin to some of the Yemar murals. A *thanka* of Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. no. 1) and a mandala of Vairochana, the Buddha of the Zenith (fig. 13), in a European private collection, are among the most significant surviving works. The massive and clear volumes of the Amitayus figure evoke a sense of scale and grandeur. The egg-shaped head is poised serenely above the massive chest and shoulders. The body rests on a lotus seat whose broadly splayed ovoid petals rise from a stylized plant with pointed buds. Just as in some of the figures at Yemar, the Buddha conveys the elemental form of pre-eleventh-century eastern Indian sculpture, before linear style began to supersede the volumetric. Even the compli-



Figure 13. Mandala of Vairochana. Tibet, 11th century. Distemper on cloth, 127 x 124.5 cm (50 x 49 in.). Private collection

cated poses of the attendant bodhisattvas convey the balance and movement of the fulsome forms. In the assemblage of the top register, many of the figures are seated on thrones set beneath canopies. They wear elaborate robes and flat hats, and shields and wine cups are placed beside them. Their dress and accoutrements indicate that they do not portray a monastic lineage, but rather that they represent contemporaneous courtiers. The two donor figures with short cropped hair in the lower left of the painting and the presiding monk seated on a rug before a group of offering stands relate to donors seen in the Yemar murals and in those at Tabo in western Tibet.[6]

The mandala of Vairochana shares similar qualities with the Amitayus *thanka*. It too has an air of spaciousness. Large portions of the background are left undecorated, and the clear volumes of the figures are not cluttered by elaborate adornments. The central Vairochana is attended by the other four Tathagatas, each of whom is surrounded by four *vajra* bodhisattvas. The form of these lesser pentads relates to that seen in ninth-century terracotta figures from Nalanda (see fig. 14) as well as to others in ninth-century Tibetan murals and sculptures.[7] The historical figures in the lower left corner that include a donor and consecrator share similarities with those in the Amitayus *thanka* and the murals mentioned above.[8] Uncharacteristically, the deities in the mandala are not positioned with their feet facing the center; rather, they are oriented in the same manner as those of the central figure. In both paintings there is a certain naïveté in the drawing of the subsidiary figures, which is not governed by the isometric rules that determine the forms of the deities.

The dating of these paintings is somewhat problematic. Certainly the style of the deities relates most closely to tenth-century and earlier eastern Indian sculptures, and it would be tempting to claim a similar date for them. However, there was a period from the late ninth until the last quarter of the tenth century when Buddhists were persecuted in Tibet.[9] Before that date, Tibetan Buddhism was mainly a court religion, and some scholars feel that the purge was mainly aimed at curbing the growing power of the court-sponsored monasteries: traditional histories see it as all-pervasive. Whether Buddhist art was produced during this period is, therefore, debatable. It is probably safe to assign an eleventh-century date for these two works.

The most important group of early *thankas*, one of the prime foci of this exhibition, stems directly from the more linear and decorative eastern Indian styles of the late eleventh and the early twelfth century. In contrast to the paintings just examined, in some of these paintings, such as the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3) and the large Buddha (cat. no. 10), portraits of monks are integrated into the fabric of the image. Such representations are not true lineages that indicate the transmission of doctrine; rather, they probably record a sectarian affiliation. The subject matter of the two paintings is also typical of the whole group of Bengali-inspired works of the late eleventh and the early twelfth century, which mainly feature benevolent Buddhist deities, such as Tara and Ushnishavijaya, and portraits. Many of these deities are shared by Mahayana and Esoteric Buddhism. However, from the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon, only the pacific Tathagatas survive. No *thankas* with wrathful deities (coming from the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras) are known.

Some of the earliest of these paintings seem to be contemporaneous with that Indian tradition and may in fact have been commissioned from India by Tibetan patrons. Works of this core group appear to have been so widely copied that their style became the dominant mode of visual expression in the following two centuries. That style is associated with a set of distinctive motifs such as throne types and decorative elements that remain remarkably unchanged. They will be discussed later in this essay.

Another probably contemporaneous group of paintings displays an eclectic stylistic mix that, although largely based on eastern Indian styles, contains decorative devices that set these works apart from those of the previous group, such as variant throne types and unusual motifs, some of Central Asian derivation. Sometimes these works also include monks who do not constitute a lineage and who are not shown as donors. Both Esoteric Buddhist and Mahayana subjects are known. These works were probably produced during a period before the eastern Indian style had gained dominance in central Tibet. They do not form a distinctive homogeneous style and therefore they will be discussed separately in the entries (cat. nos. 7, 8, 12).

Eastern Indian Buddhist Art and Practice

It has long been clear that a relationship exists between the early paintings from Tibet and the art of eastern India. Therefore, it is logical to begin with a brief examination of the art and practice of Buddhism in its homeland. Eastern India had been a



Figure 14. Panel with Avalokiteshvara, adorers, and Buddhas. India, Bihar, pre-Pala period, late 6th–early 7th century. Nalanda, Stupa 3

center of Buddhism from the earliest times, and most of the pilgrimage sites associated with the life of the Buddha are located there. The dominant form of Buddhism in the ninth and tenth centuries was the Mahayana, which focused on deities who would aid devotees in their quest for enlightenment. Esoteric Buddhism was a movement that developed over many centuries; it originated with religious reformers who lived and practiced outside the mainstream monastic tradition. Most of these mahasiddhas, or perfected masters of Esoteric Buddhism, came from eastern India, particularly Bengal and Orissa.[10] By "the late eleventh century, the center of the [Esoteric Buddhist] movement had shifted to the [eastern Indian] Pala empire."[11] As Esoteric thought and practice became accepted, it was incorporated with more traditional Mahayana practices. Some overlap exists between the two schools, and in terms of their iconography, it is often difficult to know where one tradition ends and the other begins. However, two classes of Tantras—Esoteric manuals—that played an important role in Tibet as well as in India are specific to Esoteric Buddhism: the Yoga and the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras. "Yoga Tantras teach, for the

most part, a nonsexual deva-yoga centered on Shakyamuni in a cosmic form called Mahavairochana; and *Anuttarayoga* (Unexcelled Yoga) Tantras teach a sexual deva-yoga centered in wrathful Buddhas."[12] The imagery of the Yoga Tantras is dominated by a pentad of Tathagatas, or Celestial Buddhas, with Vairochana, the Buddha of the Zenith, as their chief. In contrast, the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras focus on visualizations of wrathful deities in ecstatic embrace with their *shaktis* (consorts), meant to symbolize the union of wisdom and compassion.

Esoteric Buddhism was not a communal religion but a highly personal and private one in which the spiritual evolution of the practitioner was moderated by his guru. The adept was given a powerful (and potentially dangerous) spiritual tool such as a Tantra only when his teacher believed him spiritually ready to receive it. The text was of necessity supplemented by oral information that elucidated its hidden meanings. The goal was the visualization of a deity (or the deity together with an entourage), the personal identification of the adept with the god, and the adept's integration with the psychic realities embodied in the deity. This process led to spiritual liberation.

Although large-scale Esoteric Buddhist sculptures exist in eastern India, few have been published or found their way into Western collections. Instead, Esoteric imagery is known mostly from numerous small-scale bronzes and stone sculptures, palm-leaf illuminations, and manuscript covers. A large number of these miniature sculptures seem to have been personal devotional objects or images used in initiation ceremonies. Their small scale, which allows them to be easily hidden, may have been appropriate, given their revealed, magical, and powerful nature. Of course, paintings on cloth, which could be easily rolled up and stored, could also have served in similar fashion, but as we know, none can conclusively be said to have survived from eastern India.

Large-scale mural painting existed in India from an early date. The most famous extant examples are the murals in the rock-cut Buddhist monuments at Ajanta (late fifth century) and Ellora (seventh century) in central India. How such murals were used in the Buddhist monuments of eastern India during the period being discussed, what they looked like, and what iconographic themes were represented remain somewhat a mystery. Only fragments of murals have survived, such as those at the so-called Sarai Mound at Nalanda, shadowy remnants of deities, animals, and decorative motifs on the exterior of the building.[13] The finest and most elaborate examples of Pala-style mural painting to survive are in the Abeyadana temple in Burma (now Myanmar), probably commissioned by the Bengali queen of King Kyanzittha (fl. 1084–1113), after whom the edifice is named. It is probable that they were painted by Bengali artists. These too are in rather poor condition, especially the color, but their elaborate Esoteric Buddhist iconography and beautiful drawing give us some idea of what may have existed in India itself. In both examples, the painted images probably served as adjuncts to sculpture rather than as the main focus of devotion.

Whether any Indian *patas*, or portable paintings on cloth, survive is uncertain. Indian texts make clear that a tradition of portable painting existed, but we have little evidence of what the works might have looked like. It is curious, considering the large number of sculptures and manuscripts that were brought to Nepal and Tibet, that no Indian *pata* can be definitively identified. We must assume that manuscripts were not only brought to the Himalayan region by Indian monks fleeing political turbulence but also were probably commissioned by Nepalese and perhaps Tibetan pilgrims during their visits to India.[14] As will be seen later, it is very possible that a few of the early paintings on cloth found in Tibet were likewise produced in India for Tibetan patrons. However, so far, despite their stylistic proximity to Indian models, no *thanka* can be incontrovertibly assigned an Indian provenance.

Illuminated palm-leaf manuscripts, together with their wooden book covers, whose inner sides were often covered with illustrations, make up the largest surviving body of eastern Indian painting. As many as three hundred manuscripts (often fragmentary) are extant. Some palm-leaf manuscripts without illustrations survive from as early as the ninth century, but the earliest illuminated examples date from about the year 1000.[15] Although a few early-eleventh-century illustrated manuscripts are known, most date to the late eleventh or the first half of the twelfth century. Of these, only a small number are dated and have a secure provenance. The format and size of the genre are governed by the height and width of the palm leaf that forms the support for the painting (usually about two and one-half inches by some one or two feet). Typically, most of a palm-leaf page is reserved for text, which is occasionally broken up by small, roughly square illuminations that portray a single deity—sometimes flanked by attendants—or an abbreviated scene. The inner surfaces of the two wooden covers that shield the pages are often completely illuminated with a series of vignettes: either a row of deities or a group of related scenes, such as episodes from the life of the Buddha.

The most frequently illustrated text by far was the *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita Sutra* (The Perfection

of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses). The *Pancharaksha* (The Five Wish-Granting Goddesses) was also popular. Both texts feature goddesses as the focus of worship. The donation to a temple of such texts brought spiritual merit, and the *Pancharaksha* also was thought to bring worldly success, which made it popular in a secular context.[16] Prajnaparamita, the Goddess of Transcendent Wisdom, has a manuscript as her emblem; manuscripts themselves were objects of devotion, surrogates for the deity. The donor and, perhaps, the artist (who must have been, at least in some cases, a monk) gained merit for the patronage and production of these manuscripts.

The small number of early-eleventh-century illustrated texts that have survived may not be the product of chance but, instead, may reflect the growth of interest in the Prajnaparamita cult in monastic circles. Jeremiah Losty of the British Library believes the addition of illuminations may have been the result of Esoteric Buddhist visualization and meditation practices.[17] Esoteric deities warding off evil are portrayed, especially in manuscripts from Bengal. The *Prajnaparamita* texts were the final scriptural statement of Mahayana Buddhism as well as an integral factor in Esoteric Buddhist training.[18]

An examination of these illuminations reveals that two related traditions of painting existed in eastern India in the period we are discussing; to speak of the style of the Palas as monolithic is inaccurate. However, as very few manuscripts have colophons stating where they were made, scholars have mainly assigned a general Pala provenance to them. Losty posits a basic dichotomy between the styles of Bihar, which he calls Pala, and those of Bengal (now partitioned into the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh). He also points out that a mixture of styles can be found in paintings produced at monasteries on the Bihar–Bengal border. His arguments are persuasive and will be followed in the ensuing discussion.[19]

Losty points out that in manuscripts from Bihar, deities are usually shown resting against large pillows, their heads entirely backed by nimbi. They are often accompanied by attendant figures. Only seated Buddhas are sometimes portrayed within *bhadra*-type shrines (with pyramidal terraced roofs). Animated vignettes portraying scenes from the life of the Buddha or Jataka tales of the Buddha's deeds in an earlier lifetime also occur. The drawing style is suave, depending on a fluid and articulated line for the delineation of forms and the creation of volumes. The line is sometimes augmented by modeling in color. The palette consists mainly of primaries, including vermilion, dark blue, green, arsenic yellow, and white. Faces are ovoid, limbs curvilinear, and postures often languid.

Although the basic approach to the figure is the same, in works from Bengal deities are generally shown seated beneath the three-lobed or five-lobed opening of an elaborate shrine of the *bhadra* type, with tiered roofs ending in small upturned architectural devices or flags. Often a pair of trees backs the shrine. In some cases the deities are portrayed seated on thrones crowned by knobs.[20] In others, they are seated against architectural thrones, which mirror the articulated profiles of the shrines in which they are set. Most of these architectural elements are enlivened by courses of elaborate patterning that takes the form of lotus petals, running chevrons, or dashes that allude to the elaborately carved outer walls of Indian shrines. Esoteric Buddhist deities, both peaceful and ferocious, play a prominent role in these Bengali works, supplementing the eight great events in the life of the Buddha and the pacific deities more frequently encountered in manuscripts from Bihar.[21]

Despite their somewhat ruined state, the finest, most elaborate, and iconographically most interesting Bengali manuscript paintings to survive are the covers of a text now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.[22] On the basis of style, Losty has assigned them a Bengali provenance, but they cannot be associated with any particular monastery. The manuscript they enclosed is dated to 1134 in its colophon. Its illuminations, as is usual for palm-leaf manuscripts, are small in scale and portray only single deities. By contrast, the book covers present complex scenes with large assemblages. These scenes include the standard iconography employed to depict incidents from the life of the Buddha, such as his birth and his temptation by the forces of the demon Mara. Also portrayed is a scene of the Buddha preaching to a group of bodhisattvas and monks. The theme probably derives from the *Lotus Sutra* (fig. 15). The Buddha's double-tier throne is surmounted by an arch of stylized foliate scrolling, an ensemble that will be encountered in many of the paintings from Tibet. The inclusion of both monks and bodhisattvas in such a scene is usually associated with Central Asian works, for example, paintings from Dunhuang.[23] For this reason, the occurrence of similar iconography in the early murals at Drathang and Shalu has usually been attributed to influences from Central Asia. However, the iconography also occurs in a book cover (of either Indian or Nepalese origin) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, dated on stylistic grounds to about 1000; that scene can be identified as the first sermon of the Buddha.[24] Equally unusual are the two groups of figures representing Buddhas of the past and Maitreya, the future Buddha, standing side by



side in identical lilting poses, facing inward toward the central scene. Similar treatments are also found in early paintings from Tibet. Such elaborate illuminations make it clear that larger-scale paintings allowed the artist greater freedom to include more figures, more intricate poses, and a more complex iconography than can be found in sculpture.

Closely related in style is the sole manuscript (executed in 1145) to survive from Vikramashila (fig. 16), an important monastery on the border of Bihar and Bengal.[25] Founded in the eighth century, Vikramashila was one of the great seats of Esoteric Buddhism. Its fame comes mainly from the fact that one of its leading monks, Atisha, was invited to Tibet in the early eleventh century and played a major role in the Chidar, the second propagation of the faith (see p. 15, above). The Vikramashila manuscript's illuminations are extremely accomplished and are primarily indebted to the Bengali style. Throne backs do occur, but they are not of the type seen in Pala illuminations.[26] The miniatures show deities within Bengali-type shrines seated against Bengali-type architectural thrones with double-tier backs and elaborately decorated course work, all similar in style to that seen in the Boston Museum manuscript covers. The color in the manuscript is saturated and includes arsenic yellow (in both a yellow and an orange form), indigo blue, vermilion, white, black, and mixtures creating pink, light blue, and green. These solid tones are overlaid with finely rendered, elaborate patterning in black or color.

Influences from Eastern India

What do we mean when we assert that the primary influence on the most important tradition of Tibetan painting of the late eleventh through the thirteenth century was eastern Indian painting? To what extent was the influence iconographic as well as aesthetic? Can we be more specific in identifying the source of the influence? Did the influence come at one time, or did it come in waves?

First, Tibetan painting appropriated the Indian conception of the figure. Unlike Western artists, who depicted gods and heroes in human guise, Indian artists, over the centuries, developed complicated visual metaphors to depict deities and suprahumans. Both were shown free of the encumbrances of physical existence as manifested by internal structures such as muscle and bone. Instead, the figures were assembled from a number of the most psychologically potent and visually pleasing of forms drawn from flora and fauna: a head like an egg, a chin like a mango stone, a torso like a lion's, and breasts like mangoes, to name a few. These disparate elements are integrated by *prana* (breath), the purest of the elements. It supports the composite body from within, joining the various forms and creating the illusion of a seamless volume. This conception of the body is seen in Tibetan images of deities as well as in portraits. Indian deities often have multiple heads and limbs that signify their diverse powers. Equally, Indian *lakshanas* (physical attributes) that distinguish an enlightened being are incorporated into the Tibetan vocabulary (see p. 11, above).

The iconography of early Tibetan portable painting falls into three categories: iconic images of deities, mandalas (ritual diagrams in which the deity is portrayed in a central position, surrounded by an entourage), and portraits, all of which derive from eastern Indian prototypes in sculpture, painting, or texts. The imageries of deities and mandalas are described in detail in various Tantras of Indian origin, and the specific forms they are given in Tibetan painting are closely related to those described in the Indian texts. Deities are alike in color, posture,



Figure 15. Section of a book cover for an *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript. India, Bengal, 12th century. Opaque watercolor on wood, h. 7.5 cm (3 in.). The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (20.589)

mudras, and attributes. In most instances, their attendants are also depicted in a prescribed manner. Although no elaborate mandala has survived from eastern India, the artistic tradition did exist, as witnessed by the pages of the Vredenburg palm-leaf manuscript in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The pages can be laid out so that the illuminations form a mandala of Amitabha (the Tathagata of the West). He is shown seated in the center, surrounded by deities, within a simple version of a typical palace with four entrances.[27] Only the last category, portraiture, is absent in the surviving illuminations of Buddhist India, although mural paintings of religious figures are mentioned by a thirteenth-century monk who visited Vikramashila (see p. 11).[28] A small sculpture of a lama seated on a lotus and surrounded by deities and monks further supports the existence of the genre in India. The work was probably commissioned in India by a Tibetan (fig. 17). Also relevant is a Hindu sculpture of the Pala period from Bengal that has as its central figure a revered historical devotee of Shiva—named in its inscription—seated on a lotus base and backed by a temple setting.[29] This mode of depiction, usually reserved for deities, is similar to that used in Tibetan portraits of hierarchs.

Like those of the Pala stela, the compositions of the early paintings from Tibet tend to be rather monolithic, dominated by the central deity and his adorers or emanations (see fig. 5). The iconography of the painted images tends to be more complicated than that seen in sculptures, and the paintings often include a lower register of protective deities not found in Indian sculptures. In the early classical paintings, the protective deities are placed within the framework of the throne base (see Amoghasiddhi and Ushnishavijaya, cat. nos. 4, 6), thus rationally integrating them with the architectural structure rather than segregating them in a separate band. In a few other cases the *thanka* includes registers that supplement the main image (cat. nos. 3, 10) with assemblies of protective or auspicious deities.

The space in these paintings is shallow and friezelike, more akin to that seen in some Indian illuminations and sculptures than to, for example, the deep illusionistic space seen in contemporaneous Central Asian paintings.[30] In medieval Indian art, objects do not appear smaller as they recede in space, and it is through the overlapping of forms that an illusion of realistic space is achieved. It is somewhat difficult to compare these paintings with most Pala manuscript illuminations, which generally feature only single deities. However, those few eastern Indian paintings that do have complicated groupings of figures, like those seen on the Boston manuscript covers, exist in a similarly restricted, if slightly deeper, space in which the figures are compressed toward the picture plane (see fig. 15).

Although in the Indian tradition recession is not implied by a diminished size, the spiritual merit of a figure is. Thus, the main subject is by far the largest; the flanking principal attendants are somewhat smaller, and the surrounding subsidiary figures are smaller still. The picture is organized into a unified field according to the merit of those portrayed, rather than by mimicking naturalistic space. This hieratic arrangement is exemplified by some other early *thankas* in the exhibition. Thus, in the colored drawing of Ushnishavijaya (cat. no. 6), the two standing bodhisattvas who flank her have proportionally reduced bodies that are, in turn, much larger than those of the vidyadharas (bearers of wisdom) in the upper corners and the four guardian figures in the bottom register. The picture is dominated by the *stupa* of the goddess, and all the figures seem to be merged into the harmonious pictorial space.



Figure 16. Illumination from an *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript with the goddess Tara. India, Bihar (Bengal border), Vikramashila monastery, ca.1145. Opaque watercolor on palm leaf. The British Library (Or Ms. 6902, folio 336v.)

This kind of unified space, based in part on the relative merit of the figures, finds its fullest expression in the Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4), in which the deity is enthroned on an architectural dais whose two pierced tiers form the platform for the four guardian figures on the bottom level (their nearly identical stance is typical of early *thankas*), and, within the upper level, for *kinnaras*, the deity's vehicles (half-avian, half-human figures), and for two Atlas-like figures. The two flanking bodhisattvas are less than half the size of the Buddha, and the seated bodhisattvas of the two upper registers are similarly reduced relative to the standing figures. The protective deities, the Atlas-like figures, and the *kinnaras* are all likewise appropriately scaled down. This overall scheme lends a subtle harmony to the ensemble, typical of *thankas* of the late eleventh and the early twelfth century.

Within the friezelike format of an early *thanka* such as the Amoghasiddhi, the figures are fully developed in space. The forms are not predominantly modeled through chiaroscuro (although some internal shading is found occasionally) or changes in hue but rather through the manipulation of contours. This applies not only to the outside edges of figures and the few overlapping planes, such as the juncture of the upper and lower arm, but also to the edges of the figures' adornments, which subtly define the volumes of the surface. Thus, the curves of the undergarments of the standing bodhisattvas delineate the massing of the upper legs as well as define the contours of the stomach and the lower planes of the torso. Also, these contours clarify the subtle and complicated tilt of the entire pelvis, one of the most important elements in the *tribhanga*, or thrice-bent pose, of the figure. Jewelry serves a similar purpose. For example, bangles, although not clinging to the flesh, nevertheless define ellipses in space, implying the volume of the arm (or ankle) they surround. The subtle cohesiveness with which the artist uses these devices to develop the outline of a figure leads to its clarity of form as well as to its ability to define the surrounding space. A comparison with an Indian sculpture that is very similar in pose clarifies for the viewer exactly what the painters were attempting to render (fig. 18).

Apart from the iconic images, a number of distinct motifs occur in Tibetan *thankas* that are directly appropriated from eastern Indian sculpture and manuscript paintings. These include vidyadharas (minor deities) who appear in the corners of paintings playing musical instruments or holding flowers. Metaphorically, these deities account for the flower-strewn backgrounds of paintings, an Indian device

Figure 17. Miniature stela with a lama. India, Bengal, commissioned for a Tibetan patron, 12th century. Mudstone, h. 11.8 cm. The Phoenix Art Museum, Gift of Isobel Steele (92.45)



that reportedly accompanies miraculous presences. Throne backs in Pala art and archways in Bengali sculptures are often held aloft by a group of animals standing on each other's backs: usually (from the bottom up) elephants, *vyalas* (fantastic lion-goats), and *hamsas* (geese) (fig. 5). Throne bases in India had traditionally been guarded by lions and elephants, although the form they take in the majority of the earliest *thankas* is unusual (and will be discussed later, p. 37). Finally, the lotus seats of deities are often set on stepped architectural platforms with elaborate profiles. A cross section would show a central forward projection with a series of setbacks at either side. Although probably originally based on architectural motifs, this plan became a standard formula in the throne bases of eastern Indian sculptures. The tops of these seats are often covered with a cloth that spills over the foremost bay, forming a small swag of fabric with pleated sides, a feature that also appears in *thankas* in an abbreviated format.

Aside from pilgrims, few Tibetans would have seen large-scale Indian stone sculptures that could have been used as models in painting. We know that in the eleventh or twelfth century a number of Indian (probably Bengali) miniature stelae (many published in the literature as Tibetan) made their way to Tibet along with bronze sculptures. These were probably brought there by lamas who went to India on pilgrimage or to receive instruction or initiation.[31] Miniature shrines and small bronze sculptures may have played a role in conveying Indian iconography to Tibetans. Some of the stelae depict Mahayana deities. Others show Esoteric Buddhist subjects or the Buddha surrounded with scenes from his life, images that became popular in the late twelfth century and later but were not a prominent part of the repertoire of early *thankas* (cat. nos. 20–22, 27, for example).

With this background in mind, it is instructive to take a critical look at two of the earliest paintings in the exhibition, both of which can be dated to the late eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century on the basis of inscriptions: the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3) and the Portrait of a Lama (cat. no. 5) in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. In both, the primary influence is the art of Bengal. In each the main subject is enshrined within a trilobe arch: in the Ford *thanka* an arch forms the entrance to a cave (and to surrounding ones), whereas in the Lama portrait, the arch is part of a fanciful architectural ensemble. Both figures sit against elaborate architectural throne backs with embellished course work and jagged profiles that step in toward the top of the throne. The head of each figure is surrounded by an aureole bordered by a series of bands: first a single band, then a wider



Figure 18. Standing Parvati. India, Tamil Nadu, Chola, ca. first quarter of the 10th century. Copper alloy. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956 (57.51.3)

striped one, and lastly, a series of interlacing back-to-back scrolls. In the Lama painting the scrolls can be understood to be the foliate tails of the *hamsas* perched on the top of the throne. The same motif recurs with the tails of the *makaras* (fabulous aquatic beasts) who sit on the highest course of the surrounding shrine. Luxuriant vines were a feature of Buddhist art from the earliest period and here, in both instances, they clamber up behind the nimbus, so that only part of their structure is visible to the viewer.[32] In the Tara painting, the vegetation does not sprout from an animal; it exists as an almost abstract feature that nevertheless must have been understood by the viewer. All of these motifs can be seen in the Boston manuscript covers (fig. 15). This scrolling vine seldom occurs in Pala art, but it is also seen in the Vikramashila page (fig. 16).

Other features of the Tara also link it to works of art from Bengal. The basic iconography of the painting is closest to that of a stone stela from Somapura, Dhaka District, Bangladesh, now in the National Museum of Bangladesh.[33] The rock staffs that surround Tara's cave and the caves of the surrounding figures are found mainly in palm-leaf manuscripts from Bengal.[34] These same stylized mountain formations are also seen in the Abeyadana temple murals (ca. 1090). Also present there, behind the mountain range, is the forest setting and the animals sporting in it.[35] Tara's jewelry, particularly her wide bangles with flared ends, are close in form to those seen in the Bengali miniature sculptures, such as the Asia Society Tara (inv. no. 1978.38), and almost identical to those depicted in an illumination of Tara from the Vikramashila *Prajnaparamita* manuscript in the British Library (fig. 16).[36]

The palettes of the Ford Tara and the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait of a Lama include pigments very similar to those seen in the Vikramashila manuscript: vermilion, arsenic yellow, kaolin (white), indigo, and lampblack. Gold and azurite are the chief additions. Pigments are blended and glazes are used to form pastel shades of blue, green, and pink. However, the condition of these works is less than ideal for assessing the values of the original colors.[37] Two early works in the exhibition whose surfaces are better preserved, a large book cover painted on wood (cat. no. 8) and a panel from an Esoteric Buddhist crown painted on paperboard (cat. no. 9), will be examined instead. Both were probably varnished, and therefore the layer of paint beneath has survived in a better state.

In both, the same basic pigments used in the Vikramashila manuscript pages appear, once again supplemented by gold and azurite. The weight of the tones is very similar, and atypical for Pala illuminations, which tend to be less saturated. For example, the yellow is applied heavily to form a dense greenish yellow. The mixture of colors produces a remarkably similar group of secondary tones, a light slate blue (indigo and white), an acidic green (indigo and arsenic yellow), and a sour pink (vermilion and white). The disposition of these tones in broad sheets gives a comparable overall coloristic effect. Probably, the colors of the Ford Tara and the Portrait of the Lama were originally quite similar to these, with the addition of the darker green for the skin of the Tara and the deep saffron of the robe of the Lama (which may simply be an orpiment of orange hue).

The earliest securely datable *thankas* lead us to a rather unexpected conclusion: that the eastern Indian style to which they appear closest is that of Bengal and particularly that of Vikramashila monastery (situated in Bihar but on the border of Bengal). Their style is so close to that of contemporaneous Indian models that they appear to be part of that tradition rather than a later reaction to it. Surely an artistic connection between the style of Vikramashila and the style of the paintings we have been examining is likely. We also know that the Ford Tara and the Portrait of a Lama can be ascribed to the Kadampa school, the followers of Atisha (see cat. nos. 3, 5). The benevolent iconography of such early paintings may reflect Atisha's emphasis on the fundamental doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism; more advanced Esoteric teachings were reserved for those few whose spiritual perfection had prepared them to receive secret initiations.

There is no record in biographies of Atisha of his having brought manuscripts, paintings, or artists with him to Tibet. However, it is known that while he was resident in Tibet he commissioned three paintings from Vikramashila, where he had lived: a Maitreya and Manjushri Debating, a Shadakshari Lokeshvara, and a Mahabodhi.[38] Perhaps the disciples of Atisha followed his lead and also commissioned paintings from India? As well, many Tibetan monks studied in India, copied texts there, and could easily have commissioned works of art to bring back with them to Tibet. The existence of the carved lama portrait (see fig. 17) and Tibetan-style book covers of Indian manufacture (see fig. 6) strengthens this hypothesis. It is probable that the most iconographically complex and visually sophisticated of our paintings, such as the Ford Tara and the Amoghasiddhi (cat. nos. 3, 4), are in fact Indian works made for Tibetan patrons. Considered as such, these large-scale works augment our understanding of the Pala tradition and add a new dimension to it.

Such paintings make clear that the Indian painting tradition appears to have been somewhat inde-

pendent of that of sculpture and manuscript illuminations. Although a similar iconography may be shared, for example the Ford Tara can be compared with the Tara from the National Museum of Bangladesh—or Tathagatas with Pala sculptures—interestingly, they usually do not conform closely in composition. The Ford Tara is much more iconographically complex than the Indian sculptural version, even without consideration of its rows of protective deities. The goddess is shown with all her attendants rather than just her emanations. In paintings, Tathagatas are accompanied by standing and seated devotees. They are not portrayed that way in Pala sculptures, where they are usually flanked only by standing attendants. Similarly, the *tribhanga* poses of attendant bodhisattvas in Indian sculptures are shown frontally, whereas in our paintings they are more complex: their legs are in profile and their torsos twist into an almost frontal position.

More subtle differences also exist between our paintings and other Pala works in different media and formats. In these paintings, the throne-base guardian animals are portrayed in a distinctive fashion; their heads fill the niches, their front paws rest on the base of the opening, and the elephants' trunks are gaily painted. Although elephants can be found emerging from the niches of throne bases in stone sculpture of the Pala period in both Bengal and Bihar, it is highly unusual to find lions in the same attitude; they are usually portrayed in profile. Even when they do appear frontally, they are seldom shown together with elephants in a similar attitude, and rarely is either reduced to just heads and front limbs.[39]

A single fabric pattern of large and dense scrolling foliage is used repeatedly in our paintings (for example, see cat. no. 8). Although eastern Indian manuscript illuminations exhibit a variety of patterned fabrics covering the deities' bolsters, this particular foliate pattern is seldom found. Elaborate patterning decorates the course work of shrines in eastern Indian manuscript illuminations, but it is used for an additional purpose in Tibetan *thankas*, to form a purified field in which the image—or images—is manifest. A single band of stylized lotus petals or jewels, set on a ground with parallel swirls that indicate water, forms the border of images. The band is also used to delineate other areas within a painting, such as registers (see cat. no. 7, for example), to separate them from the sacred space of the main deity.

As the Boston manuscript covers show, Indian painting of the Pala period could reach a visual and iconographic complexity seldom encountered in contemporaneous sculpture. Certain anomalies, like the pillow fabric and the throne guardians, occur in several of our early paintings (the Amoghasiddhi and the Metropolitan's Portrait of a Lama, cat. nos. 4, 5). This seems to indicate either that they had already begun to be copied by local artists by about 1100 (the approximate date of the portrait) or, more likely, that they were standard elements of the large-scale Pala painting tradition.

But which of our other early paintings from Tibet might also be works commissioned from India? An examination of a large group of Pala manuscripts makes clear that the quality of illuminated painting varied greatly and that the average was well below that of the book covers in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or the Vikramashila manuscript (fig. 15). Although I think we are justified in concluding that the most aesthetically accomplished and compositionally complex paintings are probably Indian commissions, what can we infer about those works that are not as ambitious either in scale or complexity but that can still be closely associated with the Pala tradition, for example, the Metropolitan's Portrait of a Lama? An inscription on its reverse tells us that it hung in a modest monk's room rather than being made for an important lama or monastery. It is the earliest known securely datable work that introduces into the Tibetan visual vocabulary a whole series of eastern Indian motifs: the "deity" shown within a shrinelike architectural frame; the stepped-back throne base with moldings of Pala style; stylized throne guardians in the forms of lions and elephants; a patterned throne cloth; the double-tier throne back surmounted by back-to-back *hamsas* and *makaras* with scrolling foliate tails; the flower-strewn background; and the pattern of foliate scrolls on the pillow. The fluid line used to define the main figure is much closer to that seen in Pala illuminations than it is to the wiry line used in most *thankas*. The heavily gilt skin is highly unusual within a Tibetan context. Might this also be a work commissioned in India?

And what of works that are Pala-inspired but include elements that are clearly outside the Indian tradition (cat. nos. 7–9, 12)? In the top register of the Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara (cat. no. 12), monks wear Tibetan costume, and a Tibetan king and his two queens are shown in Tibetan–Central Asian dress. The Manjushri (cat. no. 7) features monks wearing robes with long sleeves and sandals—both non-Indian styles—Hindu deities, and a morning-glory vine substituting for the traditional lotus. The style of the vine's foliage is similar to that seen in paintings at Drathang monastery, and yet other sections of the picture, for example the figures in the lower register, which incorporate Hindu gods, are almost purely Indian.[40] The Ford Tara, a painting that we put firmly

in the Indian sphere, incorporates portraits of Atisha and Dromton that clearly distinguish Dromton's lay status, knoblike hair, and Tibetan dress.

How can these anomalies and correspondences be explained? We know that there were communities of Tibetan monks resident at some Indian monasteries (see p. 6). The monks might have informed the Indian artists about Tibetan modes of dress or the identifying characteristics of lamas. But would a Tibetan who commissioned a painting have discussed foreign stylistic conventions, such as the morning-glory foliage, with an artist? And why would the artist, steeped in traditional modes of representation, incorporate uncanonical elements into his works? Conversely, if the Manjushri was painted by a Tibetan, how did the artist assimilate so completely the Pala drawing style seen in the lower register and yet misunderstand the lotus vine? In the end, the question must remain somewhat open at this time, with the alternatives discussed rather than a Tibetan or Indian provenance assumed.

The Bengali-Inspired Tibetan Style in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

By the beginning of the twelfth century, Tibetans enjoyed a stable artistic heritage whose vocabulary derived from commissioned Indian paintings. This heritage included style of composition; basic attitudes toward space, color, and line; and a large number of individual motifs. Our "Bengali" paintings (or copies of them) appear to have been the stylistic models used by a majority of Tibetan artists throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The early Kadampa works provide a range of pictorial ideas that is constantly reused. Compositions, poses, jewelry, throne type (with associated animals, foliate scrolling, and foliate nimbus), rainbows, and decorative devices—such as friezes and flower-strewn backgrounds—can all be traced back to these early *thankas*. For example, the posture of the bodhisattva in the upper right corner of the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait of a Lama (cat. no. 5) recurs over and over again (sometimes with different *mudras*), as in the chorus of attendant bodhisattvas in the early-thirteenth-century Tathagata series (cat. no. 23) and the late-thirteenth- or early-fourteenth-century Amitayus (cat. no. 29), where in several cases the raised legs seem truncated at the knee. Similarly, the complicated pose of the attendant bodhisattvas, as seen in the Kronos Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4), is repeated endlessly in *thankas* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

There is little visual evidence to suggest that Tibetan painting continued to be nurtured by infusions of eastern Indian visual culture throughout the twelfth century, since very little was added to the repertoire that was not already available at the beginning of the century. Small variants occur but none of great significance. For example, a small Garuda with outstretched wings (an auspicious symbol) is found at the summit of the halo of many deities or hierarchs, a motif perhaps derived from Nepal or from earlier Tibetan temples, such as Kyangbu. This becomes common and visually stereotyped by the late twelfth century (cat. nos. 17, 18) and continues on into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (see cat. nos. 25, 26). Toward the end of the century we generally find a broader range of deities, longer lineages, and more auxiliary figures. The imagery of all these gods was dictated by Indian texts, but perhaps some of the main icons were clarified for the Tibetans by portable Indian images, as mentioned earlier. A close correspondence certainly exists between some of the small black stone Indian images of forms of Heruka (a wrathful deity) and Tibetan depictions of the same god.

Most extant twelfth-century *thankas* date to late in the century: few are from the early or middle part, and no murals survive at all. Whether these facts indicate scant artistic activity or chance survival is unclear. We know little of how active indigenous schools of Tibetan painting were in the twelfth century, since *thankas* (at this or any other period) were not signed by artists. We also have no information on the dynamics of the production and distribution of *thankas*. We do not know whether there were itinerant painters, or artistic centers from which monasteries could order works, or whether some monasteries commissioned *thankas* from their own artist-monks. The *Blue Annals* relates that a number of monks painted, but no works can be identified as being created by any of them. These passing references give us no clue to the types of pictures made, the circumstances in which they were created, or how and if they were commissioned.

The relative homogeneity of the Bengali-inspired works seems to point either to journeymen or ateliers, which would help to explain the wide diffusion of a single Indian style among the different Buddhist schools. *Thankas* of the late twelfth and the thirteenth century, associated with the Kadampas, Kagyus, Nyingmas, and Sakyas, are all based on Bengali prototypes. This is probably indicative of the fluidity of culture in the period, when it was the rule rather than the exception for a monk to study with teachers of different traditions. Pictorial ideas, like religious ones, would have circulated freely. Although a few thir-

teenth-century murals have survived, *thankas* seem to have been the main pictorial format of the period.[41] The dominance of the Indian prototype, both in format (the rolled painting) as well as in style, may suggest the reverence the Indian originals inspired in Tibetans as they sought to re-create Buddhist monasticism in their own land. This was especially important since, by about the year 1200, the Muslim destruction of Buddhist monasteries in Bengal and Bihar had rendered commissions from India unlikely.

One can only speculate on the reasons for the sudden increase in the production of paintings in the late twelfth and the early thirteenth century. It seems to be related to two factors: the growth of monasticism and the increased teaching of Tantric texts. This can be construed from the types of images that were created during this period. Portraits of abbots form the largest single genre; they probably functioned as icons as well as religious and political propaganda. At this time the spiritual charisma of most monasteries derived from the abbot and his lineage. In most instances, orderly modes of succession had not yet been formulated to ensure the continuation of the institution after the abbot's death. Portraits proclaimed the exalted spiritual status of the abbot, and if executed during his lifetime, such images would have empowered the newly invested with the aura of deity. Theoretically, this message would have helped stabilize monasteries during periods of succession. By the late twelfth century images of Esoteric rather than of pacific deities predominate in *thankas*. Perhaps the most popular portrayals of this period are those of Tathagatas (associated with the Yoga Tantras). They were created in sets of five, with only one painting (usually the Amoghasiddhi) depicting a lama seated before a group of offerings, perhaps the image of the monk who had consecrated the set. The Tathagatas are consistently shown, as in the Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4), resting against a pillow and flanked by standing and seated bodhisattvas. Curiously, no lineage is ever associated with this imagery, perhaps because it was so basic in Esoteric Buddhist teachings that it was not necessary to provide a sectarian history. A century and a half after Atisha had preached his conservative monastic and spiritual agenda, wrathful images of forms of Heruka (such as Samvara and Chakrasamvara) and of dakinis (flesh-eating harpies who are invoked by Tantric practitioners to consume their corporeal selves) appeared frequently (cat. nos. 14, 20–22). This shift of imagery seems to coincide with the period of monastic growth and the consolidation of schools.

Concurrently, the compositions of paintings became more complex as the need arose to include information that was not required in the earlier paintings. Additional registers were added to surround the main figure at the top (or occasionally on the bottom) and sometimes on the sides to depict the lineages that trace, from the current head of a monastery back to its origin, the transmittal of the doctrine associated with the main deity of the *thanka*. These lineage figures usually included abbots, Tibetan teachers, siddhas (perfected masters of Tantra), and deities. By this period, the size of the lineages had grown as the notion of tracing the historical roots of a monastic tradition and text became accepted as common practice. At the bottom of *thankas* another register was usually reserved for protective or auspicious deities as well as for a monk with offerings. This process of elaboration continued through the fourteenth century as, with the passage of time, lineages became longer. The number of auxiliary deities also increased, leading to further elaboration (see cat. nos. 29, 32, for example).

As noted earlier, the space in these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century paintings is flatter and the volumes less plastic than those of earlier examples. Comparatively, the style has a more decorative impact. For example, in one of the more complicated spatial passages, the *tribhangas* of the standing bodhisattvas in the group of three Tathagatas (cat. no. 23) are not as clearly defined spatially as they are in the comparable figures of the Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4). In the group of three *thankas* the sense of the weight and counterpoise of the volumes has been lost. The rear shoulders do not recede, the pelvises do not tilt downward, the front hips do not project, and the interrelationship of forms is relatively stylized and awkward. In effect, what we see is mainly the outline of the figure devoid of its original highly complex volumes, while at the same time, the linear and decorative qualities of the images become more explicit.

This kind of change probably reflects the repeated copying of models, the originals of which appear to have been of Indian origin. We have already noted that most of the building blocks necessary for the creation of Tibetan paintings were already in place by the early twelfth century. By the end of the twelfth century, Tibetan artists often captured the general form but not the most subtle characteristics of the originals. This is not to say that the finest of these early-thirteenth-century images are not impressive and accomplished paintings but to indicate that in a conservative iconographic and pictorial tradition subtle changes have nevertheless occurred that are indicative of both their period and place of origin.

The spatial shift becomes even more evident in later *thankas*, which have a more complicated pictorial structure. Although even the early pictures are frieze-

like, in later paintings the elaboration of lineages and auxiliary figures tends to negate any possibility of a coherent space with recession. For example, note in the Chakrasamvara Mandala (cat. no. 32) how the rows of figures surrounding the main deities—as well as the frieze at the bottom of the composition—emphasize both the shallow space in which each vignette exists and the overall flatness of the *thanka*. Equally, the emanations of the main figures above and to the sides, in numerous smaller vignettes and in different color combinations, have a decorative quality that intensifies the viewer's sense of the picture plane. The projection of the main figures out into the space in front of the surrounding vignettes is successful toward the top of the images but becomes ambiguous where the two disparate spaces must be reconciled, as in the area of the lotus support.

With this change in composition comes a corresponding change in the color balance of the pictures. The subtle secondary tones that are so appealing in the late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century paintings, many of which resulted from glazing, become subordinate to the predominant primary colors. Vermilion, dark blue, white, and yellow are most common. Even when the pastel tones—the light blues, mint greens, sour pinks, and pale yellows—are present, they are usually visually eclipsed by the stronger colors that are used for backgrounds (dark blues and vermilion). This can be seen clearly in the images of Taklung Thangpa Chenpo and Amitayus (cat. nos. 18, 28). The palettes of these later paintings are enhanced by some new mixtures of color, for example, the deep pink of the Vajravarahis' skin (cat. nos. 20, 21).

Shading had always been used in a limited way, to suggest volume or to create a subtle contrast. In the Ford Tara, the wavelike pattern of the inner lotus petals is brought into relief by a delicate wash of color (see cat. no. 3). This practice continues with the same motif in later works even when shading is not seen elsewhere in the painting. The eastern Indian style relied principally on an elastic line to create form, but the technique depended on great subtlety of execution and thus was extremely hard to master.[42] Perhaps Tibetan artists began to incorporate subtle shading to strengthen the volumes of figures whose linear form was insufficiently developed. In the Shakyamuni Buddha (cat. no. 16), the knees and wrists of the kneeling attendants have dark halos, as do the ankles, wrists, and neck of the Buddha and the ferocious kneeling Vajrapani. In some *thankas* the outer lines blur toward the interior of the form, heightening the sense of rounded contour (see cat. no. 18, for example).

Many of the stylistic motifs that can be seen in late-eleventh-century prototypes such as the Ford Tara and the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait of a Lama continue to be seen in these later paintings largely, but not always completely, unchanged. The small alterations that do occur in motifs usually signal a misunderstanding of the originals, which were either unavailable or unknown to generations of artists who had to rely on copies or copies of copies. Equally, the compositional form and basic motifs were applied to new iconography, which may have dictated changes. The decorative border motif continued to be used to frame fields, and variants were used to adorn thrones and their bases. The basic throne style remained largely static: a stepped-back base inhabited by lions and elephants, a throne back with two crossbars supported by rampant *vyalas* atop elephants, and a *torana* with back-to-back foliate-tailed *hamsas*. However, the number of tiers of the base varied as did their surface decoration (cat. nos. 15, 17), and the throne back began to be used with deities for whom it was formerly inappropriate (cat. no. 24). In other instances (cat. nos. 25–27) the attendant standing bodhisattvas, who should be in the same plane as the main deity, are set behind the *vyalas* of the throne back and therefore exist in an ambiguous space.[43] In several paintings (cat. nos. 24, 26, 27), the *vyalas* no longer support the throne back but float in space, unattached to the crossbar. Lastly, the *tribhanga* pose of the standing bodhisattvas was altered over time, first becoming flattened and eventually turning into a frontal pose (cat. no. 28, detail, for example).

The Bengali-inspired style continued to flourish into the fourteenth century, and its imagery was enhanced by the introduction of culture heroes such as Marpa, Milarepa, and Jnanatapa (see cat. no. 33). By the fourteenth century, the work of Nepalese artists working for Tibetan patrons challenged the dominance of the Bengali style. Many of the distinctive motifs that define the style were abandoned in favor of new ones drawn from the Nepalese repertoire. What caused that to occur will be examined in the next section.

Influences from Nepal

Nepalese-style paintings appear in Tibet for the first time in the early thirteenth century, and they can be associated with the Sakya school. Sakya monastery was situated on the trade route between Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, and Lhasa in Tibet, so foreign artists were readily accessible. The abbots of Sakya were chosen from the aristocrats of the powerful Khon clan, which controlled most of the province of Tsang in central Tibet. The early-eleventh-century murals at Shalu, another monastery of the Sakya

order, were Indian in style, and there is photographic evidence that Bengali-style *thankas*, possibly of the late twelfth century, were also present at Sakya.[44] One such painting is in the exhibition, a Panjara Mahakala (cat. no. 14). In contrast, the majority of the thirteenth-century paintings that can be assigned a definitive Sakya provenance are Nepalese in style.

It is interesting that during this period Sakya hierarchs would choose to introduce an alternative to the Bengali style popular throughout central Tibet. However, it should be remembered that after the year 1200 the possibility of acquiring paintings directly from India no longer existed; the last of the great monasteries and their ateliers had been destroyed by the Turkish invaders who swept across northern India after the Battle of Tarain in 1192.[45] In the early thirteenth century, Nepalese artists practiced the most sophisticated variant of the pan-Indian style extant. For the Sakyas, patronage of Nepalese artists may have secured for them the most deluxe and aesthetically refined art available from the Indian subcontinent. This change also roughly coincides with the period, beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, when the Sakya hierarchs became the power brokers between Mongols and Tibetans.

Just as with eastern Indian art, it is impossible to make direct comparisons between large-scale Nepalese paintings and contemporaneous early Sakya *thankas*: only one Nepalese *paubha*, or painting on cloth, made before the fourteenth century seems to have survived, and that sole example, from about the year 1100, is considerably older than the works we are examining.[46] This paucity of surviving paintings may be due to the upheaval surrounding the collapse of the Thakuri dynasty in the mid-twelfth century as well as to a disastrous fire that swept through the Kathmandu Valley in the late thirteenth century. Once again, we must turn to small-scale illuminations for stylistic comparisons. The most useful parallel is found in a pair of Nepalese book covers that enclosed a Pala-period Indian manuscript of the *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita*, now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The painted covers date to the first part of the twelfth century, somewhat earlier than our Sakya paintings.

The central image of Prajnaparamita on the back cover defines the style (fig. 19).[47] The six-armed goddess has a rounder face and plumper body than those typical of eastern Indian illuminations. She wears a multilobed crown with teardrop-shaped elements set between curves. Her scooped-out, semicircular throne back is also distinctive. Its two projecting arms are roughly parallel to the picture plane and are held up by the scrolling foliate tails of two animated



Figure 19. Section of a cover from an *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript. Nepal, early 12th century. Opaque watercolor on wood. The Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Sansk. # a 7 front cover)

kinnaras topped by rampant lions. Above the goddess is an elaborate arch, formed by the head and talons of a Garuda holding two snakes whose bodies are intertwined with the foliate tails of back-to-back *hamsas* perching atop the outer edges of the throne back. Prajnaparamita is attended by monks and bodhisattvas in naturalistic poses who listen intently to the preaching goddess. The scene is set against a background of two palm trees and flowers raining from a dark sky. The entire scene is filled with a sense of animation. The forms are bursting with life and energy not found in the more static and suave eastern Indian styles. These elements are reinforced by the flanking vignettes in which the windblown shawls of the goddesses express an extraordinary freedom of movement.

Another *Prajnaparamita* manuscript (fig. 20), dated to 1207, is closer in date and style to the early-thirteenth-century *thankas*, although it lacks some of the features observed in the earlier illuminations. The central scene shows a Buddha preaching to an assembly of monks and bodhisattvas. The semicircular throne back is still indicated, although it has become shallower. However, the figures lack the consummate grace and the auxiliary forms the spirit of teeming animation found in the Bodleian covers. The overall space is shallower, and the crowns and the throne sides are simplified. The faces in the later book cover are less ovoid and plumper, a feature that is continued in the *thankas*. The throne base, which no longer has terminal finials but simply flaring ends, is also similar to those seen in later works.

There are obvious parallels between these illumi-



Figure 20. Cover from an *Ashtasahashrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript. Nepal, dated 1207. Opaque watercolor on wood, 5.7 x 54 cm (2¼ x 21¼ in.). Pritzker Collection

nations and three *thankas* from a series of Tathagatas almost certainly painted by a Nepalese artist for a Sakya patron (cat. no. 36). Until recently, they had been considered the earliest Nepalese *paubhas* to survive.[48] However, the previously unknown Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 36c), formerly in the collection of Stella Kramrisch and now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, shows a Tibetan monk as the consecrator and, in the top register, several other lamas whose peculiar white robes seem to indicate a Sakya origin. Their iconography is also decidedly Tibetan.[49]

From a stylistic point of view their origin is clear. The shapes of the Tathagatas' faces are like those of the *Prajnaparamita* book cover of 1207. The plump bodies and the jewelry are more akin to those seen in the earlier Bodleian cover. Also alike are the elements that compose the *toranas* and throne backs. As we have seen, throne backs do not appear in the contemporaneous eastern-Indian-inspired version of this iconography (see cat. no. 23a–c). Here, the design of the throne back is similar to that seen in the Bodleian cover, but it has been abbreviated. All that is left of the curved back are two triangular sections that abut the golden frame of the enlarged pillow. The two projecting arms of the back are retained, but rather than being level, they now slant upward, a change that can already be seen in the 1207 cover. The *kinnaras* and lions of the side struts have been joined by elephants and fantastic beaked lions mounted by humans; the arch is now composed of a garland of figures: a Garuda holding snakes is flanked by *nagarajas* (serpent deities) and *makaras* with foliate tails. The standing bodhisattvas have shawls wrapped around their hips that, like the smaller shawls in the book cover, seem to have an independent life and flutter around their legs like a billowing skirt. In these paintings of Tathagatas the contained energy and meticulous attention to detail of the earlier book-cover illustrations have evolved into an almost baroque exuberance. Also noteworthy is the intensification of the blue background around the throne, which creates a dark outline. In the early fourteenth century this motif recurs and gains prominence in *thankas* and the murals of Shalu monastery, which will be discussed below.

A link between these Nepalese-style pictures and the Sakya order has long been postulated. However, only recently has the connection been firmly established for works of the thirteenth century.[50] An inscription on the reverse of a recently discovered painting of the mahasiddha Virupa in the Nepalese style definitively places it within the Sakya orbit (cat. no. 35). The inscription states that the painting was consecrated by Sakya Pandita (1182–1251), one of the most important hierarchs of the order. It was probably painted between 1216, when Sakya Pandita became the lineage holder at Sakya monastery, and 1244, when he left Tibet for the Mongol court, never to return. Unfortunately, there are almost no features that can be used for a direct stylistic comparison of the Virupa *thanka* with the three Tathagata paintings. The former is anecdotal and relaxed, whereas the latter are iconic and formally structured. The miniaturized details that are so prevalent in most Nepalese-style works are not seen in the Virupa; it shows quasihistorical scenes rather than paradises enhanced with jewels and riches of every kind. Nevertheless, the freer and more exuberant drawing in the Virupa suggests that it may be somewhat earlier in date than the three Tathagatas.

The next Nepalese-style painting that we encounter stands apart stylistically from the group we have been discussing. The Green Tara in the Cleveland Museum of Art (cat. no. 37) is a work of

the highest order, comparable in its technical and aesthetic mastery to the earlier Ford Tara (cat. no. 3). It is possible that it was painted by the Nepalese artist Aniko between 1261, when he was brought to Sakya monastery, and 1270, when he accompanied his patron, Phakpa, to the Mongol court, where he became increasingly involved with projects for Khubilai Khan. Several factors are of particular interest here: the more developed space in the painting; the use of subtle shading to lend more dimension to the form; the extraordinary detail used to elaborate all the surfaces of the throne, temple, and background; and the interweaving of Nepalese and Bengali-style motifs. The space in this painting, although still relatively shallow, is far more layered, complex, and visually clear than that in any of the Nepalese-style pictures we have examined so far. Even the body of the goddess, although described by the same artistic means, has more mass. The organization of background, trees, temple, throne, and goddess is manifest not only in the overlapping of forms but also in the choice of tones, each set clearly apart from the other. The separation of the throne base from the temple is unprecedented, as is the way in which the foot of the goddess (resting on its green lotus support) extends in front of the throne base and lotus seat. The clarity of pictorial and coloristic structure allowed the artist to embellish the surfaces with myriad details, far more complex than in earlier works, without complicating the space. Such elements as the animal figures on the throne base, the form of the throne back, the multilobed arch, and the basic form of the temple structure show a knowledge of Tibetan works inspired by Bengali-style art.

Although contemporaneous murals are not the subject of this exhibition, the early-fourteenth-century murals at Shalu illuminate a particularly interesting facet of the development of Tibetan painting that is otherwise difficult to illustrate (see fig. 21). Royal members of the Shalu and Sakya clans had intermarried in the mid-thirteenth century, the period when the Sakya hierarchs acted as governors of Tibet for the Mongols.[51] In the early fourteenth century, Shalu monastery "was thoroughly renovated and transformed into a complex conceived in accordance with the fashion in vogue in China at the time."[52] As part of this project, a group of artists was brought from Yuan China to execute a series of murals. The style of the major images can only be described as a Nepalese variant with some Bengali and Central Asian elements. The most likely explanation is that they were painted by artists trained in Aniko's atelier,[53] which may have included a multinational group of Tibetan, Chinese, and perhaps Nepalese painters as well. The name of only one artist remains at the site, and he can be identified by his clan name as Tibetan.[54]

These iconic Shalu murals bear an obvious and close relationship to the *thankas* that we have been discussing. The use of elaborate detail throughout, *toranas* of similar configuration, the exaggerated facial type, and the intensification of the blue background around the edges of the main figures can be found in most early Nepalese-style *thankas*. Although many of these features can be seen in the earliest group of Nepalese-style paintings, a comparison with the Green Tara is particularly telling, despite the fact that most of the eastern-Indian-style elements that appear in it are absent in the murals. The Nepalese facial type, with its large slit eyes, aquiline, downward-turning nose, small mouth and round chin set close together in a plump face, is particularly close. The forms in both are corporeal and the space is plastic. In the Tara, as in the murals, subtle shading is used to create an illusionistic sense of mass. Both share the single-tier throne back and the pronounced upturn at the ends of the architectural elements that take the place of the antefixes in Bengali-style works. The saturated tones typical of Newari paintings are replaced in the murals by "transparent, sometimes brilliant other times soft hues of light blue and red, cream and pale green."[55] These are related more to the tones seen in the Cleveland Tara than to those in most earlier or later Nepalese works. All these similarities seem to support the ascription of the Tara to Aniko and to validate the likelihood that the Shalu murals were produced by artists schooled in his version of the Indo-Nepalese tradition.

The Nepalese style does not seem to have gained wide favor in Tibet in the early fourteenth century, so very few paintings in the style are extant. The few that are exhibit many Nepalese characteristics: the squat figures, distinctive facial type, and floral scrolling. Stylized flames surrounding the outer edge of the aureole of a wrathful deity are seen in a few paintings. In works from the early part of the century, the flames emerge from behind the aureole, as in the Vajrapani at Shalu and the Raktayamari (cat. no. 39), whereas later on, they are more stylized and overlap the edge of the red field (see cat. nos. 43, 44).[56]

By the second half of the fourteenth century the style had begun to be actively copied. A few eastern-Indian-style paintings of the Kagyus from this period contain elements of the Nepalese style. For example, the Portrait of a Lama in the Metropolitan Museum has a Nepalese-style *torana* (see cat. no. 30). Nepalese body and facial types are seen in many *thankas* of this period, and the decorative lotus-petal and jeweled



Figure 21. Mural with Ratnasambhava. Tibet, Shalu monastery chapel, ca. 1306. From Vitali 1990, plate 71

borders of the Bengali style are superseded by the Nepalese-style simple yellow line.

A firm connection between the Sakyas and the Nepalese style is seen in a mandala series from the beginning of the last quarter of the fourteenth century that has long been—incorrectly—associated with Ngor monastery.[57] The set uses a single compositional structure: a palace surrounded by a series of circular realms with top and bottom registers for lineages and protectors. Many of the same stylistic features that have been discussed are repeated here, and once again the Nepalese penchant for, and extraordinary control of, detail is apparent. A Vajradhatu mandala (cat. no. 45) that is not otherwise related to any known series is closely connected in style, but it is probably somewhat earlier in date. Its extraordinary level of craftsmanship and detail sets it apart, even in a group of masterworks, as a tour de force. One can only marvel at the quality of the fluid drawing of a single element, but admiration must be mixed with awe when one realizes that the same feature is repeated over and over again without any loss of

freshness. A Vajravali series of mandalas dating from after 1429—formerly dated incorrectly to the 1390s—is in the same stylistic mode, but the compositions have become much more complicated, often incorporating four or more smaller mandalas within a single composition (cat. no. 47a–c). We know that this series was produced by a group of Nepalese artists who offered their services to Kunga Sangpo at Ngor.[58]

The last great painting in the exhibition that can surely be attributed to a Nepalese artist is the Ganapati (cat. no. 49), although in this case the patron is known to have been, at least late in his life, a Gelukpa, a follower of the Dalai Lama. The extraordinary exuberance of the image; the style of the jewelry, *torana*, vase, and foliate supports; the stylized rocks at the bottom of the painting; and the superbly rendered details (note the highlights on the jewels in the crown) are all purely Nepalese in spirit and style.

The Nepalese works commissioned mainly by Sakya patrons represent the most accomplished productions of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth century. Lesser examples, probably by local artists emulating the style, also exist, mainly from the second half of the fourteenth century. Only one of these, among the finest to survive, has been included in this exhibition: the Mahakala (cat. no. 48). The large scale, harsher coloration, and comparatively perfunctory control of decorative elements make it possible that this work was painted by a Tibetan.

These fourteenth-century Nepalese-style paintings also signal a change in iconographic emphasis. Mandalas and depictions of ferocious Esoteric deities became more popular. Fewer images of the Tathagatas are seen, and although portraiture began to give way to images of cultural heroes, it was not totally eclipsed.

The Nepalese style continued to be influential in the fifteenth century, and several of the late paintings in this exhibition owe more to it than to Bengali inspiration. The Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 55), with its extravagant details and miniaturization, is such a work. The facial type of the subsidiary figures owes more to Nepalese than to Indian prototypes, as does the style of the main *torana* and the columns of water pots sprouting vegetation that support the trilobed arches of the subsidiary shrines. At the same time, the influence of China is clear. The two paintings of Vaishravana (cat. nos. 52, 53), although mainly influenced by Chinese art, show Nepalese tendencies in some of their details. A yellow line rather than a decorative border delineates fields, and the facial types of many of the secondary figures are also Nepalese.

Influences from China

The first major appearance of Chinese influence during the period we are examining is seen in the Shalu murals, painted about 1306. As we have seen, the primary images are mainly Nepalese in style. However, the surrounding decorative elements include large-scale bold patterns that are probably derived from the Yuan decorative-arts repertoire, some of which can be traced to Central Asian sources.[59] Peony scrolls, stylized cloud patterns, and borders of interlocking triangular motifs are some of the most prominent. Their aesthetic is much livelier than anything encountered earlier, and it is completely removed from the Nepalese penchant for miniaturization.

The narrative murals in the surrounding processional corridor at Shalu contain other Chinese elements, including costumes and architecture. Perhaps more important, they display a deeper, more naturalistic arena that, for the first time, offers an aesthetic alternative to the friezelike space that had dominated Tibetan painting since the late eleventh century. Although these Chinese elements have only sporadic influence on the art of fourteenth-century Tibet, they presage important changes to come.

A small number of *thankas* depicting arhats (Buddhist monk-saints), dating from the fourteenth through the early fifteenth century, are the most significant paintings to show strong Chinese influence. The subject matter is extraordinarily different from that of most works in the exhibition. The settings are in the everyday world rather than in a transcendent or ceremonial space, such as those of the Virupa or the Jnanatapa (cat. nos. 33, 35). Typically, they have landscape backgrounds. In one of the earliest paintings of the group, the Los Angeles County Museum Arhat (cat. no. 50), the landscape is not coherent and naturalistic, as are those seen in later arhat paintings. Rather, beginning with the main figure group, which shows great variation in relative size, the scale is chaotic. The landscape is miniaturized, but it includes a series of rather naturalistically rendered large plants—with the exception of the stylized lotus blossom to the left of the arhat—that relate the main figures to the setting. The way in which the plants and mountains are depicted shows the influence of contemporaneous Chinese paintings. By the late fifteenth century arhats are shown in coherent landscapes, often with deep recession.[60] The flora, fauna, and terrain in these *thankas* are consistently more closely observed and prominently recorded than are similar elements in eastern-Indian- or Nepalese-inspired paintings, where they are stylized and relegated to a comparatively small role. The

costumes seen in these and related works often reflect contemporaneous Chinese styles of dress.

Chinese costume forms one of the major new elements that were adopted in Tibetan paintings prior to the mid-fifteenth century. The loose-fitting garments in the Arhat painting (cat. no. 50) are distinctive in their fit and their naturalistic delineation. The robes in thirteenth-century portraits are highly stylized, and there is a tendency to restrict the number of folds seen around the figure, even if the pleating of the fabric between the legs is elaborate. Fourteenth-century portraits, although retaining the simplified main contour of earlier images, were embellished by undulating edges and folds of fabric that supplement the main outline and soften the internal forms (see cat. nos. 29, 30).[61] By the late fourteenth century this mannered but more naturalistic style is apparent in the depiction of deities as well; it combined with a new idiom, ultimately derived from Tang China, in which the scarves of deities are shown as billowing around their limbs in stylized arcs (cat. no. 54). The array of brocades is much greater than in anything seen previously. In portraits, the vests and the under and outer robes often have different patterns as well as contrasting borders. This tendency was already evident in some of the Taklung portraits, and we know that Chinese textiles were available to the Tibetans in the thirteenth century. However, it becomes more prominent in later paintings (see cat. nos. 29, 54).

From at least as early as the twelfth century, the guardians of the directions, who often appear as auxiliary figures in *thankas*, are shown wearing Chinese armor (see cat. nos. 16, 25). However, it is not until the fourteenth century that some of the guardians, Vaishravana in particular, become the main subject in *thankas*. Vaishravana's armor—and that of his troops—is Chinese, but its presence is iconographic rather than stylistic (see cat. nos. 52, 53).

Perhaps the most important Chinese influence is a more naturalistic approach to space, which contrasts markedly with the friezelike depictions seen in earlier Tibetan *thankas*. Chinese painting had never adopted the shallow space of Indian painting and relief sculpture but instead had opted for a deep and dramatic setting in which the scale of deities was often dictated by their position in space, not their relative merit. At first this new vocabulary was introduced irregularly in such paintings as the Arhat and Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch (cat. nos. 50, 55). In the former, the space is not totally coherent, but the effect is more naturalistic. In the latter, a purely Chinese rocky landscape can be seen below the main throne, which itself shows Chinese influence in the form of its lozengelike openings and its stereoscopic depiction. The billowing scarves seen in the Paintings for Evocation Rites (cat. no. 54) are also likely based on Chinese models. By the second half of the fifteenth century the use of deeper space and the more naturalistic treatment of figures were widely practiced, although even in the great series of murals at Gyantse monastery, they are applied only sporadically.

Conclusion

A small corpus of eleventh-century paintings can now be identified, all influenced by the styles of Pala India. Beginning in the second half of the eleventh century, a group of these was commissioned by the Kadampas from either Bengal or the Bengal–Bihar border. Subsequently, these works appear to have provided Tibetans of other schools as well with a vocabulary of style, compositions, and motifs, which enabled them to create their own paintings in a style that became dominant in central Tibet. The Indian originals were mimicked, but later distinctive Tibetan characteristics evolved. This Bengali-inspired style flourished into the fourteenth century.

Within the small extant group of late-eleventh- and early-twelfth-century paintings it is difficult to establish which are Indian and which Tibetan. Artistry combined with broad scope may define those most likely to have been produced in India. However, we should not banish from the canon less ambitious works with stylistic affinities to Pala paintings that may have been produced for lesser patrons or by less distinguished artists.

Some paintings from Tibet can be assigned to specific monasteries or schools, but these do not seem to define larger style groups, apart from the paintings by Nepalese, with their strong affinity to the Sakyas. Although the paintings from Taklung monastery are all related in style, they must be seen as a part of the broader Bengali-inspired tradition.

We know almost nothing about the artists who painted the works we have been discussing and little about their methods. The relative homogeneity of the Bengali-inspired group would seem to point to itinerant painters working for a number of monasteries and schools. This would be consistent with what we know about the peripatetic lives and diverse religious training of Tibetan monks during the period we are examining. As far as can be determined, the Nepalese-style paintings are initially the work of Nepalese artists who either traveled to Tibet in search of employment or were brought there for specific projects. By the second half of the fourteenth century the Nepalese style had begun to supplant the Indian.

In reality, many of the finest paintings produced for Tibet from the eleventh through the early fifteenth century were probably commissioned by Tibetans from artists whose native countries had highly developed and well-established artistic traditions. In the thirteenth century a large number of masterworks were produced by Tibetans in their version of the Indian style. However, there is little evidence of Tibetan artists working concurrently in a variety of styles, although such claims are frequently made in texts. More likely, such statements reflect a nationalistic assertion of native capabilities.

During this formative period, the major preoccupation of the Tibetans was literary: the transmission, translation, and systemization of the Buddhist canon. In art as in religion, it was tradition, not change, that was essential. Therefore, a pictorial lineage whose roots could be traced to the Buddhist homeland was the most legitimate expression of Tibetan Buddhist sacred visions, just as the Indian religious texts were. Although the Bengali style was dominant in Tibet in the first half of the period we are considering, by the early thirteenth century—perhaps because of the almost complete annihilation of Buddhism in India—the Sakyas turned to Nepal for artists of the highest caliber. This Nepalese influence was to grow throughout the next two centuries. By the early fourteenth century, the influence of the Yuan court, with its intermingling of Central Asian and Nepalese styles, began to be felt. The Yuan dynasty ended in 1368, and by the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth century, Tibetans began to emerge from the shadows of China, India, and Nepal, and develop a hybrid style that drew from each but was truly their own. In this new style, Nepalese influence predominated, but the synthesis combined Indian iconography and body type, modified Nepalese physiognomy and decorative motifs, large-scale Yuan decorative motifs, a mannered realism, and dynamic poses, achieving truly Tibetan visions of unprecedented spirit and resonance.

Catalogue

1. Amitayus

Tibet, 11th century
Distemper on cloth
138.4 x 106.1 cm (54½ x 41¾ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund, 1989 (1989.284)

Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life, sits in a meditative posture; in his hands he cradles his attribute, a vase that contains the elixir of immortality. Like Ushnishavijaya and the White Tara, he is invoked by devotees wishing to obtain long life. He is flanked by the standing bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara (left) and, probably, Manjushri (right). The bodhisattvas seated above are differentiated by color, gestures, hairstyle, and crown or *ushnisha* (cranial protuberance). However, they cannot be specifically identified.[1]

The historical figures in the top and bottom registers are distinctive, and their presence implies an early date for the painting. The top row of seven probably represents some type of court or clan assembly. All but one figure wears a flat hat; five sit against throne backs and four of these are sheltered by parasols. The leader, who can be identified by his red mantle enhanced with rondelles, sits with a wine cup and a shield placed to his right. The figures at his left are probably his wives (without thrones, wine cups, or shields). On the far left of the painting, the two figures wearing brocaded inner robes and holding wine cups are probably courtiers. Their shields are nearby. The two yellow-robed figures flanking the aureole (presented without wine cups or shields) might be minor officials or lamas. At the bottom left of the *thanka*, a seated couple with shoulder-length hairstyles, probably the donors of the *thanka*, hold their hands in *anjali mudra*, the gesture of reverence or adoration; lotus stalks with burgeoning buds spring from their hands, as also seen in other groups with donors and attendants (cat. no. 8). At the lower right a monk seated with a shield beside him attends offerings set on tripod stands. Included in the offerings are two conical objects set on the ground. The monk is probably the consecrator of the painting.

In this *thanka* the emphasis is on volume rather than on decoration, unlike most of the Bengali-style paintings in this exhibition, which emulate late-eleventh- and perhaps early-twelfth-century Indian models where linear development was the primary concern. A number of the motifs are also uncharacteristic and point to an earlier date. Many of Amitayus's elaborate ornaments are atypical: the jewels hanging from or set above the armlets; the carefully arranged sash on the lotus seat; the *bindi* (forehead ornament), which also appears on the surrounding deities; the elaborate hair-braid ribbons that fall over the shoulders; the low double crown; and the tall *ushnisha* with an upper tier of flanking ribbons. Amitayus is backed by an unusual throne, three courses of which can be seen, and the nimbus has a distinctive surround of lotus petals. The simple border design of half-ovoid forms with central half rosettes—perhaps an indication of lotus petals—is not set against a water pattern but intermeshes with a triangular motif of dots. The ovoid faces with heavy chins are distinctive, and the seat of the Buddha emerges from a lotus plant akin to that seen in the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3), not a common feature in early *thankas*. The overall impression of this painting is that it is somewhat provincial, but many of the details of the principal figures reveal a sophisticated understanding of Indian models. SMK

1 See cat. no. 4, note 1.



2. Chakrasamvara Mandala

Central Tibet, ca. 1100
Distemper on cloth
83.8 x 58.5 cm (33 x 23 in.)
Private collection

This painting depicts the mandala of Chakrasamvara, which is often described as the "wheel of great bliss." At the center, the twelve-armed Samvara embraces his consort, Vajravarahi (the Diamond-like Sow). The couple appears at the center of five concentric circles of deities. In the first circle, on an eight-petaled lotus, are the goddesses Dakini (east), Lama (north), Khandaroha (west), and Rupini (south). Marking the intermediate points of the compass are skull cups (*kapalas*) atop vases, said to be filled with the thought of enlightenment (*bodhichitta*, southeast), blood (southwest), the five ambrosias (*panchamrita*, northwest), and the five illuminations (*panchapradipa*, northeast). The second circle, described as the "circle of thought" (*chittachakra*) includes eight deities and their consorts, marking the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass.[1] Further groups of eight deities mark the third, fourth, and fifth circles, said to be the circles of speech (*vakchakra*), body (*kayachakra*), and intuition (*samayachakra*), respectively.

Outside the mandala lies a fascinating narrative that depicts the eight cremation grounds (*shmashana*). Each is associated with one of the cardinal or intermediate points of the compass. Their names vary from text to text but are commonly known as Chandogra (Terrible and Frightening), Gahvara (Impenetrable Abyss), Jvalakulakaranka (Blazing Skull), Vibhishana (Terrifying), Lakshmyavana (Lakshmi's Garden), Ghorandhakara (Frightening Darkness), Kilakilarava (Shrieks of Joy), and Attattahasa (Boisterous Laughter).[2] Myths associate these eight grounds with Indian sites where yogins convened for lengthy periods of meditation; Tantric texts also allude to Esoteric rites practiced in Indian charnel grounds. Some texts offer psychological interpretations of the cremation grounds, suggesting that they represent the eight aggregates of human consciousness (*ashta vijnana kaya*), which tie man to the phenomenal world and to the cycle of birth and rebirth.[3]

Although the eight cremation grounds are a standard part of the iconography of wrathful deities (see cat. nos. 14, 21, 48), their depiction here is unusual by virtue of the complexity and subtlety of the composition and by the sheer power of its evocation.[4] Consider the three naked, long-haired yogins, seen from behind as two dark-skinned yogins face them, all five shielded by umbrellas (fig. 2). They are surrounded by scenes of horrible torture, such as a headless yogi with flames shooting out of his neck, providing sustenance for two disembodied heads that lick the flames. One sees mythical creatures whose tails are fashioned out of flames, corpses in disarray, without limbs,



2: Detail



hands, or heads, being carried off or eaten by peculiar predators. There are scenes of disembowelment such as the unfortunate man silenced by impalement (see detail). Skeletons, demons, and ghouls wearing helmets surround and sometimes engage the yogins. In the midst of these frightening, disorderly scenes, enthroned bodhisattvas preach the *dharma*, suggesting the indestructible nature of Buddhist teachings.

The painting's upper register depicts three dakinis; two forms of the wrathful male deity, Achala; and the Green Tara. The bottom register includes Shakyamuni in the earth-touching gesture (*bhumisparsha mudra*); a male bodhisattva; a dancing yogin surrounded by two female acolytes; a monk wearing red robes; a naked yogin seated on an animal skin; the god of wealth and prosperity, Jambhala; two monks seated on carpets in front of a throne back; a group of ritual implements separates the two monks. One of these monks wears a hat, both wear a sleeveless shirt under yellow outer robes, and their heads are shielded by umbrellas.

A date of about 1100 is proffered for this *thanka*. With the Tara painting (cat. no. 3), it shares similarly long-limbed goddesses; the body modeling of the dakinis in the upper register compares closely with that of the main Tara. Moreover, the monks in the lower right corner resemble those in the eleventh-century Amitayus (cat. no. 1); both portrayals show monks against trilobe thrones, their heads shielded by umbrellas. The treatment of the cremation grounds in an unsegmented narrative compares closely with a Nepalese Chakrasamvara painting of about 1100, now in the Metropolitan Museum.[5] JCS

1 This mandala's iconography follows a description in the twelfth chapter of the *Nishpannayogavali*. For identification of the remaining deities in Samvara's circles, see Mallmann 1975, pp. 50–52, 187–89.
2 After Mallmann 1975, pp. 349–51. See also Seattle 1990, p. 266.
3 For a brief description of the eight *vijnana*, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, pp. 156–57.
4 Later instances usually represent these scenes as mere symbolic motifs in narrow bands around the mandala (for example, New York 1997, p. 85) or in the corners of crowded compositions (for example, New York 1997, pp. 86–87).
5 New York 1997, pp. 72–73.

3. Tara

Central Tibet (commissioned, perhaps in eastern India, for Reting monastery), ca. second half of the 11th century
Distemper on cloth
122 x 80 cm (48 x 31½ in.)

The John and Berthe Ford Collection, Baltimore

This painting combines two of Tara's most popular iconographic forms: as Ashtamahabhaya, who protects her devotees from the Eight Great Perils, and the Khadiravani (Dweller in the Magical Khadira Forest).[1] Both forms were familiar to Tibetans in the late eleventh and the twelfth century, since by this time many Indian liturgical treatises associated with the worship of Tara had been translated into Tibetan.[2] Known iconographic texts do not precisely describe this work, but the painting might have been at least partly inspired by the *Arya Tara Ashtabhaya Trata Nama Sadhana* (Sadhana of Arya Tara, Called Protection from the Eight Perils), a brief seventh-century liturgical text describing the worship of Tara.[3] The original Sanskrit text, written by the Indian scholar Chandragomin, was translated into Tibetan by Atisha (982–1054) and his assistant, Naktsho. As the Austrian scholar Eva Allinger has argued, except for minor variations the four main figures in the painting closely resemble the descriptions in Chandragomin's account.

Tara and four attendants are seen within the trilobe arch of a mountainous cavern, described in Chandragomin's work as "on a lake, in a jewel cavern."[4] Her two immediate attendants are probably Marichi (on Tara's right, holding a *vajra* [thunderbolt scepter] and an *ashoka* branch) and Pratisara (on her left, holding a jewel and, probably, a lotus—abrasion makes it difficult to decipher).[5] To Marichi's right is an orange pig-faced goddess and, behind Tara's left arm, the goddess Bhrkuti, "the colour of kohl [black]," wrathful and holding a skull cup (*kapala*) and a ritual chopper (*kartrika*). Tara's languid body is adorned with an array of jewels. A fine orange gauze gathers in her lap and falls almost undetected along her limbs. A diaphanous shawl, now just barely evident across her upper arms and chest, bears an elegant circle motif. The fine tapering fingers of her left hand hold the





3: Detail

stem of a lotus, while her right hand assumes the gracious gesture of bestowing generosity (*varada mudra*).

The four figures are seated upon lotuses that are held high above a lake or pond by a sturdy central stalk from which other curling vines emerge. Two *nagas*, earth spirits associated with snakes and water, lend support to the central lotus on which Tara sits. The lotus's scrolling vines are infused with three-dimensionality: red, golden, and blue stems, one behind another, are crossed by additional vines that wind backward into a darkness enlivened by deep green leaves connected in a complex web. In the foreground to the left are an antelope and, perhaps, a panther, one glancing over his shoulder as if alerted to a predator, the other panting as he moves forward. As though obedient to the symmetrical demands of the artist, two elephants maneuver ponderously through trees on the other side of the central lotus stem.

In her form as Ashtamahabhaya, Tara was patron and guide to traveling Buddhist merchants and pilgrims. In this painting, she appears eight times in the side registers, offering assistance to devotees. The Eight Perils described in Chandragomin's account include physical dangers that were very real to travelers of this period: attacks by the demons who cause disease or by bandits, stampeding elephants, lions, and poisonous snakes; the perils of being caught in forest fires, in floods (perhaps drowning in

failed attempts to cross rivers or streams); and false imprisonment in foreign territories. Although these perils were also associated with obstacles to spiritual development (for example, lions were associated with pride), there can be no doubt that this form of the beautiful and supremely compassionate Tara was also beseeched for protection from the dangers confronting medieval travelers.

Above the mountain staves enclosing the deities of the top register is a tropical jungle where haloed, bare-chested figures frolic with lions and elephants, a reference to Tara's role as Khadiravani, Dweller in the Magical Khadira Forest. The mountain staves throughout the painting are filled with figures of small humans and animals playing or making offerings to deities. The Celestial Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Of Infallible Accomplishment) appears in the top register (center) of this painting. He is mentioned in Chandragomin's account as adorning the crown of the practitioner who undertakes the visualization of Tara outlined in his *Sadhana*.[6] Also in the top register are (left to right): Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, two bodhisattvas, Vairochana, and Akshobhya. The bottom register presents five figures of six-armed deities, perhaps Locana, Mamaki, Manjuvajra, Pandara, and Tara.[7] In the bottom left corner of the painting is a Tibetan monk, identified by the sleeveless undershirt (*choko*) worn under his robe, a feature of Tibetan monastic garb needed as protection from the fierce cold of the Tibetan plateau. He is seated before offerings and implements of sacrifice.

In 1995, the painting was sent to London for conservation by Robert Bruce-Gardner of the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, who uncovered inscriptions on the back of the painting that had not been seen previously because the work had been covered with a modern cloth before framing. Mantras and a Buddhist creed, beautifully written in a red ornamental Sanskrit script (*ranjana*), were found and beneath these, another Buddhist creed, written in Tibetan script.[8] The scribe arranged the inscriptions to combine in the shape of a *stupa*. Along the top of the painting other inscriptions are written in black Tibetan script. These begin with a brief note, in a hand different from that of the lines following, which states: "The Reting God[dess]."[9] Then there are two lines that state: "The personal meditational image [*thugs dam*, 'meditative commitment'] of Chason Dru-o. Consecrated by Sechilpuwa of Chekhawa. Placed [opposite] the Protector Deity at Chilbu [monastery]."[10]

The "Reting" mentioned in the inscription refers to the monastery by that name founded in 1057 by Dromton, the chief Tibetan disciple of the Indian Buddhist master Atisha. It became the main seat of the Kadampa order of Tibetan Buddhism. It seems that the painting later came into the hands of another Kadampa teacher, Chason Dru-o (who died in 1175), and was reconsecrated by one of his disciples, Sechilpuwa, who died in 1189. Sechilpuwa of Chekhawa monastery installed the image at Chilbu, another early Kadampa monastery, which he had founded.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these brief historical references. The inscription states that the painting was the personal meditational image of Chason Dru-o, but that does not necessarily mean the work was executed for him. Tibetan paintings commonly bear inscriptions that were written after the painting was created, to record subsequent owners and/or subsequent consecrators. Exactly how this work, described in the inscription as "the Reting deity," came into the hands of Chason Dru-o and, eventually, of Sechilpuwa is not entirely clear, but we do know that by the end of the eleventh century Reting monastery was not faring well. In 1082, after the death of Reting's abbot Gonpapa (1016–1082), the monastery was temporarily without a leader, the beginning of what Tibetan historians describe as a period of "religious hunger."[11] Few details are available, but Potowa (1031–1105) was eventually invited to fill the post of abbot at Reting. He did so for three years but was then forced to flee because of personal antagonisms within the community.[12]

When Potowa died, the responsibility for his more than thirty-five hundred followers fell to his disciple Sharwapa (1070–1141). One of Sharwapa's most prominent disciples was Cha Chekhawa, also known as Chason Dru-o, cited in the inscription mentioned above. Like most of his contemporaries, he had studied with many teachers before 1130, when he joined Sharwapa, with whom he remained until the latter's death in 1141. Chason Dru-o then founded Chekhawa monastery, where his most important disciple was the monk Sechilpuwa, who, in turn, founded two monasteries, New Chekha and Chilbu. After Chason Dru-o's death in 1175, Sechilpuwa oversaw both New Chekha and Chilbu monasteries until his own death in 1189.[13]

As to the question of how this Reting image entered the hands of Chason Dru-o and Sechilpuwa, it is likely that the painting was taken from Reting—perhaps by Potowa or Sharwapa after they had served as abbots at Reting—and passed eventually to Chason Dru-o, who used it as his "personal meditational image." He then gave it to his disciple, Sechilpuwa, who reconsecrated it and hung it at Chilbu monastery after Chason Dru-o's death. The Tibetan historian Go Lotsawa notes that Sharwapa, when abbot of Reting,



3: Detail

"took away the *Sutra Samuccaya*," a text that once belonged to Atisha.[14] There is considerable evidence to suggest that, in Tibet, sacred images were passed from master to disciple (see cat. no. 20), the images being made more sacred by their association with a revered teacher.[15] Moreover, Go Lotsawa notes that Chilbu monastery had other relics (*'phel gdung*) of Atisha, including his bell and his *vajra*.[16]

The painting's association with Reting (The Reting God[dess]) lends credence to earlier descriptions of the two historical figures above Tara's cave as Atisha (on the viewer's left, dressed in Indian monk's garb) and Dromton (on the right, dressed in Tibetan robes). It is well known that Tara was Atisha's patron deity, and the linking of this painting's iconography with Atisha could not be more appropriate. If the image had been painted originally for Chason Dru-o in the mid-twelfth century, it is unlikely that the lineage would have included only these two masters and omitted Potowa and Sharwapa, his spiritual progenitors. The presence of Atisha and Dromton alone suggests a late-eleventh-century date, sometime between the founding of Reting in 1057 and the "period of religious hunger" at Reting, which began about 1082.

Did a Tibetan artist create this painting, or might it have been executed by an Indian artist? The chief argument in favor of an Indian origin is essentially one of aesthetics. Since the painting was first published in 1984, scholars have noted its close stylistic affinity to eastern Indian medieval art,[17] which has led some authors to suggest that it might have been made by an eastern Indian artist for a Tibetan patron.[18] The physiognomy, posture, and sensuous form of the central figure, Tara, epitomize the formal canons of eastern Indian medieval art. Moreover, the work is sophisticated both in conception and execution, suggesting it is the product of a highly sophisticated artistic tradition. Note the strong parallels, for example, with the portrayal of Tara in an illumination from a Perfection of Wisdom manuscript, dated to about 1073 or 1151, and composed at Nalanda monastery in Bihar.[19] Even allowing for the difference in scale—the painting is forty-eight inches in height, whereas the illumination is about two inches—the facial characteristics and the gently lyrical posture with tilted head, rounded abdomen, and fluid, gently tapered arms and legs are all very similar in the two works. The hairstyle, gathered into a lobe that falls on one shoulder and adorned with a diadem, is analogous, as is the jewelry, particularly the wide armlets and the large gold ear plugs. There are also strong affinities between their respective attendants.

John Huntington has noted the stylistic parallels between this figure and an eleventh-century stone Tara from the Dhaka District of Bangladesh.[20] Robert Fisher has demonstrated remarkable affinities between this work and a bronze sculpture of Tara from Kurkihar in Bihar.[21] And Pratapaditya Pal has already observed that the mountain staves of the Ford painting are typical of those seen in eastern Indian

manuscript illuminations.[22] With an illuminated manuscript from Vikramashila monastery, dated to the fifteenth year of Gopaladeva (ca. 1140), this work shares a temple setting for the deity (fig. 16). Even minor details suggest the artist's familiarity with eastern Indian canons and styles: the goddess wears toe rings, a common feature of Indian jewelry, but not typically worn in Tibet; nor are they typically represented in Tibetan paintings. Close parallels can also be found between this painting and the Burmese murals at Pagan's Abeyadana Temple, built in about 1090 and named after Queen Abeyadana, the principal consort of King Kyanzittha (fl. 1084–1113).[23] These murals were produced by artists working in an eastern Indian style or, possibly, by eastern Indian artists themselves.[24]

One recalls that Atisha commissioned paintings from Vikramashila monastery while he was in central Tibet (see above, pp. 12–13), and one wonders whether someone at Reting followed a similar course, arranging for this work to be produced at an eastern Indian center such as Vikramashila (Atisha's last residence in India). Although superb examples of eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibetan paintings have survived, this Tara is unique in aesthetic terms, for more than any other early Tibetan painting with which I am familiar, it embodies the aesthetic canons of eastern India. In the recently discovered pair of repoussé book covers published here (fig. 6), one finds an example of an Indian genre adapted for a Tibetan patron. The same could be true of this Tara, that it is an Indian *pata* painting adapted to suit the iconographic needs of a Tibetan patron by the inclusion of Atisha, Dromton, and a Tibetan monk in the lower left corner. It is perhaps relevant to note that in 1057, Dromton brought Atisha's bodily remains to Reting from Nyethang monastery, where he had died in 1054; Giuseppe Tucci notes that Dromton placed Atisha's remains in a *stupa* built by an Indian artist known as Acharya Manu.[25] It would have been appropriate for a work of this Tara's grandeur and quality to be commissioned for the most important of Kadampa monasteries. JCS

1 For earlier discussions of the iconography of this work, see Pal 1984, Appendix; Seattle 1990, pp. 318–20; New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 128–32; Allinger 1995; Singer 1994.
2 See Willson 1986, where this literature is reviewed.
3 As first noted by Eva Allinger.
4 Translated in Willson 1986, p. 340.
5 This painting's iconography deviates from Chandragomin's text chiefly in its rendition of these two figures, who are described in the text as "Marici and Pratisara, golden-coloured, one-faced, two-armed, lovely with ornaments, in the left [hand] holding *ashoka* tree and *vajra*, right in the manner of wish-granting"; Willson 1986, p. 340. But, as Allinger notes, the attendants do correspond to other iconographic descriptions of these two goddesses, notably those represented in Chandra and Raghu Vira 1991, illus. 655, 656.
6 Willson 1986, p. 340.
7 Allinger 1994.
8 *Om sarva siddha hum / Ye dharma hetu prabhava hetum tesham tathagato hy avadat / tesham ca yo nirodho evam vadi mahashramanah /*. This may be translated: "Those things which have a cause as their origin, their cause has been stated by the Tathagata; their cessation too the great *shramana* [ascetic practitioner] has stated." This inscription is composed in Sanskrit and transliterated in Tibetan script. Hereafter referred to as "ye dharma," this verse is a *dharani*, a mantra whose sounds are considered so sacred that they are retained in phonetic transliteration.

In Tibetan *umey* script: *bzod pa dka' thub dam pa bzod pa ni / mya ngan 'das pa mchog des sangs rgyas gsung // rab tu byung ba gzhan la gnod pa dang // gzhan la 'tsher ba dge sbyong ma yin no//*. This may be translated: "The holy ascetic practice of patience is the best path to Buddhahood, thus the Buddha has said. For a monk to harm others is not virtuous practice." This verse, which also appears on eastern Indian stone images, is translated into Tibetan. It is sometimes referred to as the "patience" creed.
9 *ra sgreng ba'i lha/*.
10 *bya rtson 'grus od kyi thugs dam / sa'[se'] spyil phu ba'i rab gnas gzhugs / mchad kha ba'i / spyil phu ba'i chos skyong la gtad do/*.
11 Roerich 1979, p. 266.
12 Ibid., pp. 266–67.
13 This information derives from Go Lotsawa's account in ibid., pp. 270–80.
14 Ibid., pp. 271–72.
15 See also the Asia Society's *Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript, which bears a series of inscriptions recording its successive ownership by Buddhist masters in India and, subsequently, Tibet. See Seattle 1990, pp. 185–89.
16 Roerich 1979, p. 281.
17 Seattle 1990, pp. 318–20; New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 128–32.
18 Pal 1984, Appendix; Singer 1994, pp. 96–108.
19 Published in Seattle 1990, pp. 185–89, and colorpl. 58c. The colophon states that the manuscript was written by the scribe Ananda of Nalanda in the fifteenth year of the reign of Vigrahapala [III], whose dates are ca. 1058–85. See the Pala chronology set forth in Sircar 1976, pp. 97–98. Susan Huntington has recently adjusted Sircar's dating to include the reign of Mahendrapala, and I follow her chronological adjustments. The Huntingtons have suggested that two leaves from this manuscript may be somewhat later, perhaps contemporary with a rededication in the eighth year of Gopala [III], ca. 1151. The manuscript includes important Tibetan colophons, written by subsequent Tibetan owners. See Seattle 1990, pp. 185–89.
20 Seattle 1990, p. 320.
21 Fisher 1997, pp. 132–33.
22 Pal 1984, Appendix.
23 For further discussion of these parallels, see Singer 1994, pp. 107–8. The Abeyadana murals are published in Luce 1969–70, vol. 3, pls. 207–41.
24 Luce 1969–70, vol. 1, pp. 321–22.
25 Tucci 1949, vol. 1, p. 89.

4. Amoghasiddhi Seated in His Northern Paradise

Eastern India(?), late 11th century
Distemper on cloth
78.4 x 57.2 cm (30⅞ x 22½ in.)
The Kronos Collections

This is one of a small group of early *thankas* with explicit ties to eastern India. There is grandeur and clarity in its conception and a quality in its drawing that sets it apart (see p. 32). It is also one of the few paintings in the exhibition that has no clearly Tibetan element. No Tibetan costumes appear on deities or donors; there are no Tibetan inscriptions, no iconography inconsistent with the Indian tradition. This painting was probably part of a set depicting the Five Celestial Tathagatas. In Tibetan sets of these deities, the consecrating monk is usually shown in the bottom register of the Amoghasiddhi (see cat. nos. 23c, 25, 36c), but in this painting, he does not appear. Sets of Tathagatas become important in Tibet in the late twelfth and the thirteenth century; therefore, this is an important prototype.

Amoghasiddhi, the "incorruptible," can be identified by his green color; the gesture of *abhaya mudra* (protection from fear) that he makes with his right hand; and the two *kinnaras*, half human–half avian creatures, his traditional vehicles, in the top tier of his throne. His lotus seat rests on a two-tier throne, and he sits against a pillow decorated with a large-scale pattern of dense foliate scrolling. No throne back is shown, but the two triangular jewel-encrusted elements projecting from behind the pillow and aureole are probably meant to indicate one. He is flanked by two standing bodhisattvas: to his right, Padmapani, and to his left, Maitreya. Two groups of five seated bodhisattvas flank him in two tiers above.[1] All the deities wear elaborate jewelry, but the armlets lack decorative swags. Five nearly identical guardian figures with three heads, six arms, and two legs appear in a single row at the bottom of the *thanka*, within the lowest level of the throne base. The figures differ only in their *mudras*, the weapons that they hold, and the order in which they hold them. They are probably five of the ten Krodha deities, guardians of the directions.[2]

The painting conveys an overall impression of space and form rather than surface decoration. Volume is created largely through the skillful manipulation of the outer contour of the figure and by the use of garments and jewelry to define the surfaces of the forms. Contours are marked by a thin wiry line that rarely changes in thickness. The line moves into the form only when it is used to express the overlapping of two large volumes, such as at the juncture of the upper edge of the forearm and the upper arm in the central figure. As in the Indian tradition, the success of the artist in creating volume and space is dependent, first, on his ability to manipulate the relationship of one line to another so that they break free of the flat surface of the picture plane and create the illusion of motion in space, and then by the use of elements of costume placed on or near the surface of the forms, which helps to define their surfaces or imply their volumes.

The drawing of the figures is particularly fine; the volumes are fluid, as are the contours, and the position of the forms is subtly delineated within the space. For example, although the basic posture of the standing attendant bodhisattvas is repeated endlessly in early Tibetan *thankas*, the finesse with which the complicated movements of the thrice-bent posture (*tribhanga*) are depicted here is extremely unusual. Rarely does the viewer understand the upward thrust of the inner hip versus the forward jut of the outer one. Here it is indicated through the contours of the undergarments and belt that define the forms. This motion is then set in opposition to the twist of the torso, with the inner arm moving forward and the outer arm falling in a plane behind the forward leg. The head, which sits securely above the juxtaposed motions of the body, tilts backward and is shown in three-quarter view.

Because of the painting's early date and possible eastern Indian origin, some of its decorative elements should be discussed in order to compare them with contemporaneous paintings as well as with later works. The border is made up of a lotus-petal motif; the interstices are filled with a pattern of parallel curves implying water. In Indian thought the lotus is associated with purity and spiritual transcendence. The border creates a metaphoric sacred space, a lotus field appropriate to the spiritual beings who inhabit it. The upper beam of the two-tier base is adorned with a border that combines lotus petals, stepped rectangles, and blunted triangles. The struts are decorated with ovoid or diamond-shaped elements laid end to end, and the lower rail with a series of lozenges placed against each other like dominoes.



The changes of pattern and color along the horizontal lines are meant to indicate changes in the profile of the throne base as it recedes in a series of steps. Spraylike bursts of finely rendered foliage fill the two-tier spaces at either side of the throne base. This motif seems to appear (in a somewhat less refined manner) only in some of the earliest Indian-style *thankas*, where it serves a similar function (see cat. no. 2). SMK

1 The meaning of these groups of bodhisattvas is unclear. Wayman (1991, pp. 117–18) mentions in his introduction to the *Guhyasamaja* Tantra that there are five kinds of people who receive initiation and adhere to pledges and vows. They seem to represent different levels of insight and spiritual elevation. That description does not correspond precisely to the groups of five here, nor to those who form the chorus of listeners in paintings of Tathagatas, whose number may vary, but their various crowns, *mudras*, and colors may indicate that some such distinction is implied.

2 Mallmann 1986, pp. 219–20.

5. Portrait of a Lama

Central Tibet (for a Kadampa monastery) or eastern India, ca. last quarter of the 11th century
Distemper on cloth
46.4 x 36.2 cm (18¼ x 14¼ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Friends of Asian Art Gifts, 1991 (1991.152)

Despite the large number of early Tibetan lamas whom we know about, there is no distinguishing characteristic that identifies this monk. The *thanka* can be securely dated to the last quarter of the eleventh century—or perhaps the very beginning of the twelfth—because of an inscription on the painting's reverse. It states that the image (*sku*) was placed by hand (*phyags nas ma*) on the eastern wall or wing (*shar ma*) of his residence (*gzim chung*) by Chen Nga Tshultrim Bar (*spyan snga tshul khrims 'bar*, 1038–1108).[1] Tshultrim was a disciple of Dromton, the main follower of Atisha. Since a monk would revere his teacher above all, the first assumption would be that it is a portrait of Dromton. However, Dromton never took monastic vows and is usually shown with curly hair and wearing lay garb (see cat. nos. 3, 11). Therefore, the identity of the sitter remains elusive. It is also unclear whether this is a lifetime or posthumous portrait. Considering the reverence bestowed upon teachers during their lifetimes and our knowledge that lifetime portraits were painted, this is a real possibility. The lama sits on a raised throne surmounted by an elaborate *torana* and holds prayer beads before his chest. He wears Tibetan garments: a sleeveless vest of saffron color covered with small gold sprigs, a dark red robe draped asymmetrically across his chest, and a saffron-colored mantle patterned with stylized flowers at the center of foliate roundels.[2] This *thanka* is particularly important, as it displays for the first time many compositional and stylistic motifs that became ubiquitous in twelfth- and fourteenth-century *thankas*. Also, it is one of the two known early Tibetan portraits in which a lama is portrayed as a deified being.[3]

Many of the motifs seen in this painting are related to eastern Indian prototypes.[4] The monk is seated with his feet in a crossed Yogic posture beneath a trilobate arch. This arch corresponds to those seen on the front porches of eastern Indian temples[5] and indicates that, metaphorically, he is meant to occupy the temple's inner sanctuary, the space usually reserved for the deity. The heavily gilt skin is unusual, another indicator of divine status, since it relates to the uncorrupted bodies of deities.[6] He sits directly—without an intervening lotus seat—on an elaborate raised dais; between the supports the heads of stylized lions and elephants peer out. Here, they are shown in a distinctive frontal manner, the lions grinning broadly, the elephants with painted trunks, and both animals with their feet resting on the ledge of the throne base.[7] A cloth with a floral pattern is draped over the middle of the dais.[8] The back of the dais supports an architectural ensemble whose supports are composed of three types of animals: elephants, *vyalas* (fantastic leonine creatures), and *hamsas* (geese) that brace the base of the tripartite arch. Two rather squat *makaras* (fantastic aquatic creatures), with their trunks thrown back parallel to the ground, stand facing outward on the second tier of the temple; gilt foliate vines sprout from their tails and snake up behind the arch, forming a filigree pattern.[9] The sides of the archway are supported by layers of animals: *hamsas* on the heads of *vyalas* that are standing on recumbent elephants. The throne itself has a two-



tier back, an unusual feature found in some thrones pictured in Bengali illuminations, including the book covers in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Vikramashila manuscript (figs. 15, 16). It is surmounted by two *hamsas* whose tails, like those of the *makaras*, have metamorphosed into similar scrolling vines. In the upper corners of the painting two symmetrically posed bodhisattvas holding large lotuses rest on lotus seats placed against large patterned pillows; their crossed pendant legs are supported by Yogic straps, an element usually dispensed with in similar depictions. A golden triangular motif appears on either side of the pillows, probably alluding to a throne back. The bodhisattvas appear to be gazing toward the central figure. The field of the painting is strewn with flowers.

The pigments of the painting became embedded with dirt, and the original palette has only been partially revealed by cleaning. Nevertheless, hitherto unseen colors are now revealed: pale greens, whites, and pale orange. The background was originally deep blue, the inner robe vermilion. A Pala precedent for the gilt skin can be found in a *Pancharaksha* manuscript in the Cambridge University Library, where the skin of the deities is gilded.[10] Heavy gilding was certainly applied to some Pala bronzes. Later Tibetan portraits use a much thinner, filmier layer of gold (see cat. nos. 17–19). The lines of the drawing, most clearly visible in the details of the face, arms, hands, and feet, are particularly elastic and unusually wide, not at all the typical wiry line encountered in most early paintings. The wide line is used to create great plasticity and in many ways is close to that seen in Pala manuscripts. Finally, the disposition of color planes is clear and leads to an easily readable space.

Although the painting was owned by a Kadampa monk, where the painting was made is uncertain. All of its features point directly to India rather than to a skillful reinterpretation of Indian motifs by a Tibetan artist. At this time our knowledge is simply insufficient to allow a definitive conclusion. SMK

1 Parts of the inscription are extremely difficult to translate. According to Zenkar Rinpoche of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, *phyags nas*—"placed by hand"—may be an archaic way of saying "to consecrate." The inscription was also studied by Gyurme Dorje.
2 Although they occur in later images as well, the provenance of these textile designs is unknown.
3 The other is a portrait of Atisha, also in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of the Kronos Collections, 1993.479. Its inscription states that it was a present from Rinchen Gangpa to Tonpa Darlo, thereby dating it to the same period.
4 See, for example, Foucher 1900–1905; Bhattasali 1929.
5 Here, the existence of the temple is only intimated.
6 See also my essay in this volume and cat. no. 7.
7 The animals seldom occur in this fashion in Pala art, though this manner of depiction is typical of later *thankas*. The closest parallels are in Pallava art. See Meister 1983, vol. 1, part 1, figs. 22, 30.
8 This element is found in Pala sculptures, where it is clear that the cloth is supposed to be covering the entire seat, and merely spills over the front of the throne base. It is therefore somewhat abbreviated here and in later *thankas*.
9 The association of floral motifs and Buddhist deities goes back to at least the Gupta period, where abstracted vines are found as one of the elements in aureoles.
10 See Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, pp. 70–72, with reference to the *Pancharaksha* manuscript in the Cambridge University Library.

6. Ushnishavijaya

Eastern India or central Tibet(?), 11th–12th century
Distemper on silk
Without mounts: 22.9 x 17.8 cm (9 x 7 in.)

The Kronos Collections

The eight-armed Indian goddess Ushnishavijaya is one of three deities associated with longevity and the fulfillment of earthly desires. The other two are the White Tara and Amitayus. Ushnishavijaya combines aspects of three goddesses (hence her three heads), each associated with a *sadhana* (wish). Here she sits on a single lotus seat in front of, but metaphorically within, a *stupa* (reliquary mound), which is dictated by her iconography. Poised in the clouds at the top corners of the *thanka* are vidyadharas (garland bearers) holding pots of vegetation (the one on the upper left may hold *durva* grass, whose exceptional durability is associated with aspirations for a long life). The sky is filled with gently tumbling flowers. In many respects the image follows the basic canon for the depiction of the goddess and her entourage. Her *mudras* and attributes are all present in the standard order, and she is flanked by the bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, to her right, and Vajrapani, to her left. However, her left head is usually horrific rather than



pacific, and her lotus seat should rest on a moon. The four deities of the cardinal directions, who should be guarding the four quadrants over which they preside, are instead assembled below: Achala (east), Takkiraja (south), Niladanda (west), and Mahabala (north).

The *stupa*, with its low dome and multistoried base, compares generally with *stupas* portrayed on Pala stelae and manuscripts of the eleventh century and on tenth–eleventh-century miniature clay votive tablets.[1] The antefix at the corner of the building is a feature commonly seen in *thankas*. In most eastern Indian manuscripts antefixes represent small flags placed at the corners of buildings (often against a curved molding which, in the Tibetan versions, seems to assimilate them.)[2] However, there are instances, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts covers and in Bengali sculptures (for example, an Avalokiteshvara from Tapandighi), where such antefixes occur.[3]

On the reverse of the *thanka* is a long *umey* (Tibetan cursive script) inscription in red ink in the shape of a *stupa* (see fig. 49). The head of the deity is centered under the *harmika* (the section above the dome), and the body is enclosed within the main mass of the *stupa*. Superimposed in black script are mantras that consecrate each of the deities in the painting, including the vidyadharas.

The composition and overall feeling of this small *thanka* relate it most closely to the Kronos Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4). There is a similar sense of the monumentality of the central figure in relation to the auxiliary ones and of a continuous space throughout the whole picture. The four guardian figures (although theoretically iconographically distinct) are mere images of each other, exactly as in the Amoghasiddhi. The artist's drawing is skillful in the use of details to define the forms they adorn. Some of these, for example, the subtleties of the *tribhanga*, are not as successfully conveyed as in the Amoghasiddhi, perhaps because of the great difference in scale. Other details, such as the scarves fluttering from the top of the *stupa*, the flowers twisting in the breeze, and the flowing volumes of the principal figure, are beautifully rendered. Some of the goddess's jewelry, particularly her crown with three large spearlike elements and the wide bracelets with raised borders, are similar to those seen in the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3). As noted earlier, pacific deities dominate in the group of early *thankas*, and representations of Ushnishavijaya are not found again until the fifteenth century. This is the earliest painting on silk in the Bengali style that we know of. The golden color of the fabric might have been meant to mimic that precious material.

Once again we are dealing with a picture that has extremely close ties to Pala styles and that, apart from its Tibetan inscription on the reverse, has no clearly definable Tibetan pictorial elements. The drawing of the central deity is less suave and fluent than that of the finest Pala examples, but this does not rule out an Indian origin. Our knowledge is insufficient to determine absolutely where it was painted.[4] SMK

1 Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, fig. 25a; Tucci, *Stupa*, 1988, p. 76, fig. a; and Seattle 1990, pl. 156.

2 See Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, figs. 23ab, for a pair of book covers from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, said to be from Bihar, 1150–1200, but probably from Bengal.

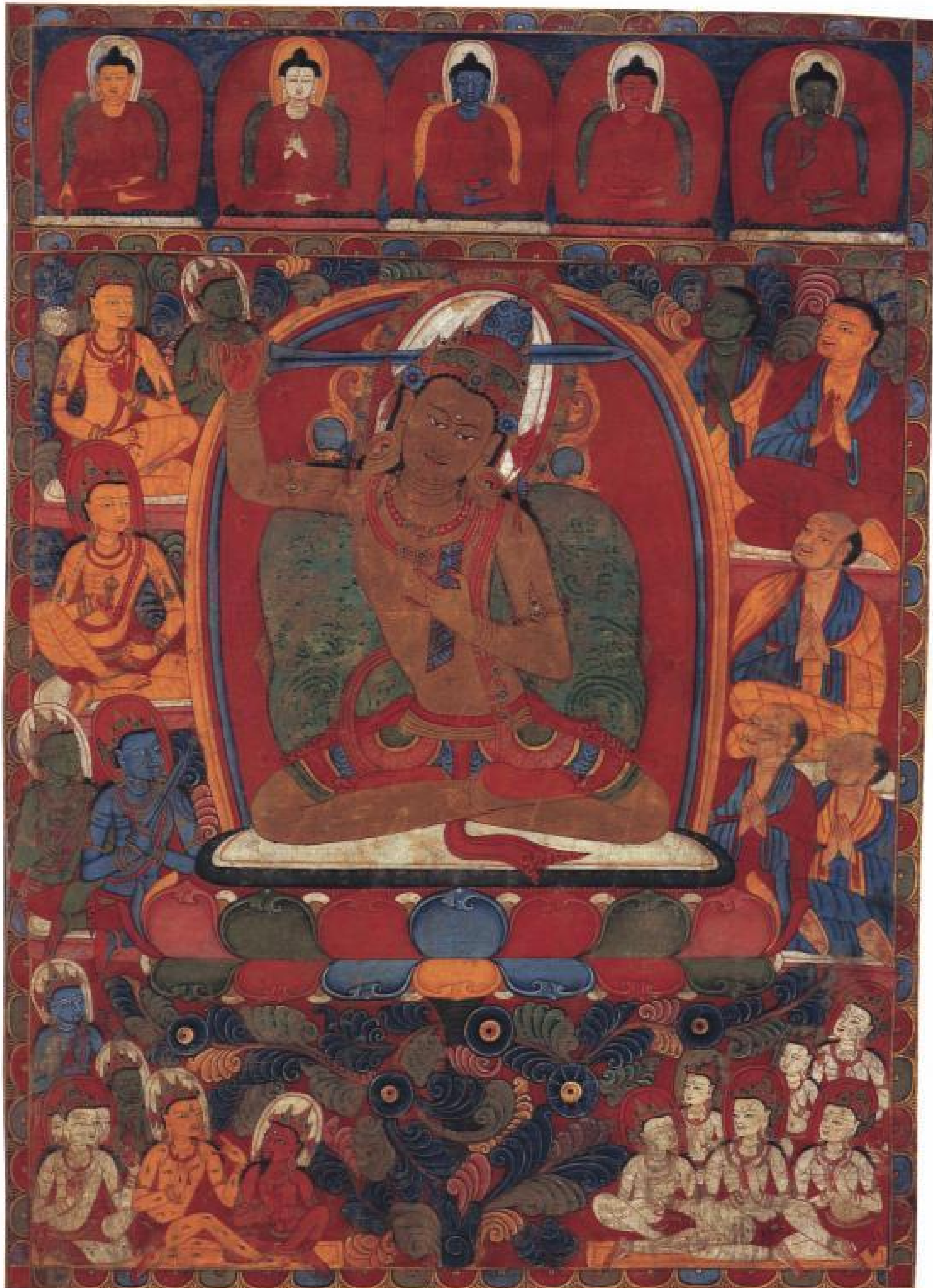
3 Seattle 1990, pl. 237.

4 According to James Watt of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the mounts appear to be fourteenth century, judging from the silks.

7. Manjushri

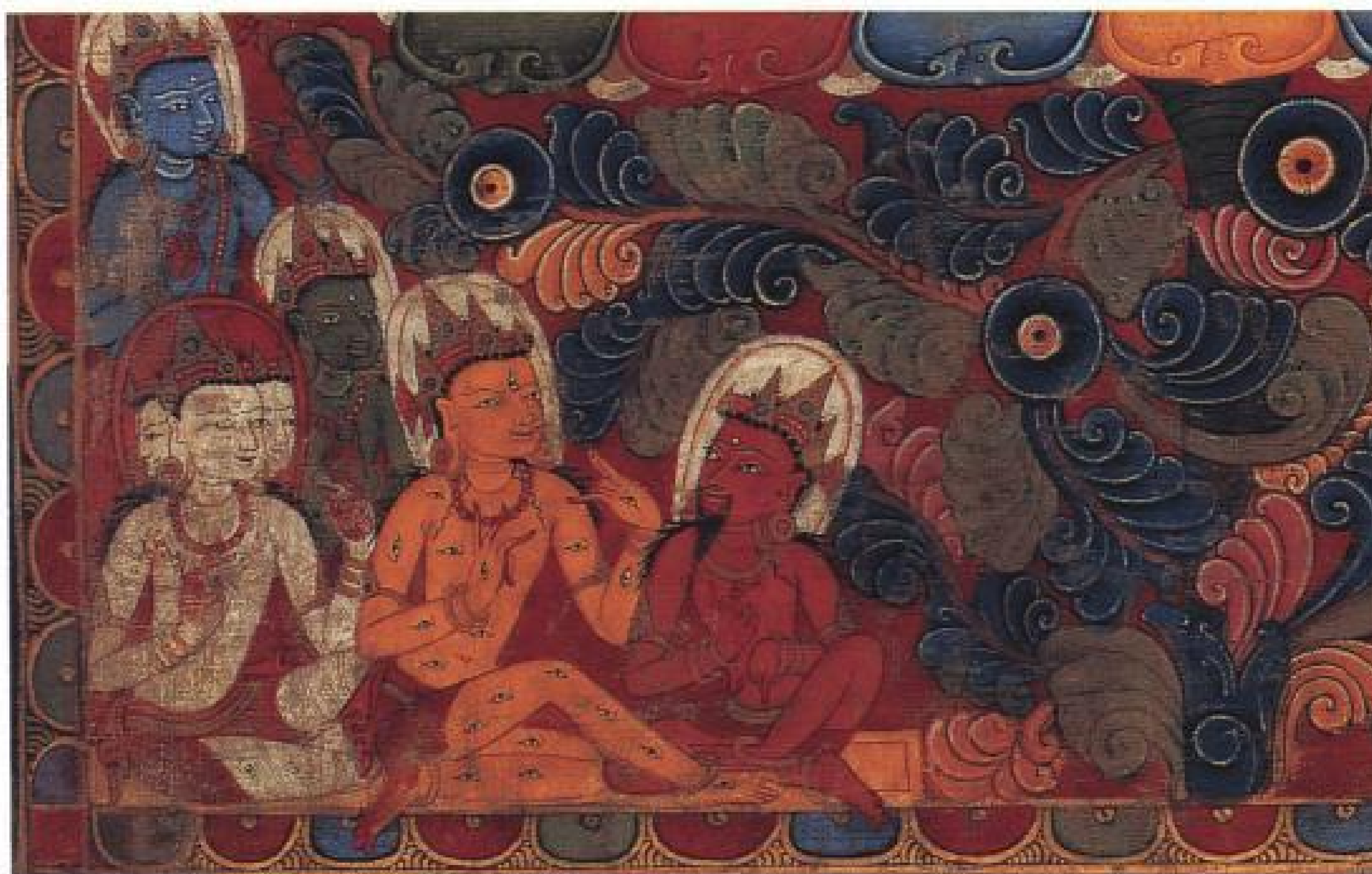
Central Tibet or eastern India, late 11th–early 12th century
Distemper on cloth
46 x 33.7 cm (18⅛ x 13¼ in.)

Private collection



This painting portrays the golden-skinned bodhisattva Manjushri seated on a lotus. With his right hand he holds a sword above his head, and with his left, he clutches a manuscript to his chest—appropriate attributes for a deity who is both the "dispeller of ignorance and the disseminator of knowledge."[1] He is surrounded by a quadripartite rainbow and sits against a large bolster, which has a scrolling foliate pattern and buttons on the side. His jewelry and dress are typical of those seen in related work inspired by eastern India. Manjushri is flanked by adorers receiving his teaching. On his right are five seated bodhisattvas, two of whom hold ritual objects: a sword, perhaps indicating Samantabhadra, and a *vajra*, perhaps connoting Vajrapani; and on his left are five monks, all of whom raise hands to their chests in a gesture of adoration (*anjali mudra*).[2] The skin color of these figures is varied to include natural shades as well as blue and green. At the bottom right six smaller bodhisattvas, all making a gesture of adoration, are seated on a mat. Opposite them, five deities are also seated on a mat; included are three Hindu deities: Brahma (the three-headed deity), Indra (the deity with one thousand eyes), and Agni (the red-complexioned deity with a goatee). At the top of the painting, surrounded by a lotus band, is a register with the five Tathagatas (Ratnasambhava, Vairochana, Akshobhya, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi). Akshobhya, who is in the center, is the head of Manjushri's family.

Many features of the painting are closely related to those of eastern Indian models. Throughout, the fluid, elastic line is used to delineate the volumes of the figures in ways more reminiscent of Indian palm-leaf illuminations than of most *thankas*. The figures are particularly expressive and convey a variety of types: torsos lean slightly, legs and arms are imbued with a subtle balance, heads are gently tilted, and the eyes of the figures express character, mental acuity, and interest in the complexity of the scene. The occasional use of color modeling and highlights can be observed, particularly in the dark-colored figures and in the lotus petals, a practice of Indian origin. An Indian precedent for the burnished golden skin of the image also exists.[3] Similar heavy gilding, although unburnished, also occurs on two portraits in the Metropolitan Museum that may also be of Indian workmanship (cat. no. 5).[4] Also unusual are the mats, rather than lotuses, on which many of the deities sit.[5] Although lotus seats are more common, this too is known in some Indian illuminations. The manuscript that Manjushri holds seems at first to resemble a *pushtaka* (an Indian palm-leaf manuscript), but it is shorter and wider, close in scale to a few early manuscript covers, presumably Tibetan, that seem to be versions of the Indian model.[6] However, Indian sculptures often show deities holding a shorter, if not necessarily wider, *pushtaka*. The iconography is closely related to that of a scene of the



7: Detail

Buddha preaching in the Tushita Heaven, from a manuscript cover in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (fig. 15). The monks and bodhisattvas even have similar skin tones.

Nevertheless, a number of features in this *thanka* are unusual. The range of colors is atypical, particularly the use of a pale blue and a saturated orange-yellow. The atypical manner in which the monks' apparel is worn is similar to that of lamas in the top left corner vignette of another of our portable paintings (cat. no. 12) as well as in the Drathang murals (fig. 12). The monks' outer cloaks are worn in the same way, but here, instead of a vest like those seen in the small painting, the monks wear a long-sleeved garment as in the Drathang murals. The style of the monks' robes is also close to that seen in the Drathang murals, although those robes tend to be much more elaborately patterned and trimmed. The monks also wear sandals, not characteristic of Indian dress. The monks' physiognomy is emphatically not Tibetan and may be meant to represent Indians. Although Hindu deities are portrayed in some Esoteric Buddhist texts, their inclusion in a *thanka* of such early date is highly unusual. In later *thankas*, Hindu deities that have been appropriated into the Buddhist pantheon are sometimes part of intricate mandalas or appear as protective figures in the lower registers (see, for example, cat. no. 23a).[7] Uncharacteristically, here the extremities of some of the figures extend beyond the lotus-petal border. Although several South Asian paintings show Buddhas preaching to an assemblage of monks and bodhisattvas (see p. 41), the significance of this particular assembly, with a bodhisattva as the central figure, is unclear and awaits further study. Finally, the foliage and blooms of the "lotus" plant are peculiar, with their yellow throats and blue trumpets they are much closer in form to morning glories, another flower that opens to the sun but that is not otherwise depicted in Indian or Tibetan art. There are affinities to the depictions seen on the murals at Drathang, where leaves are delineated in various colors, marked with firm, thick lines, and highlighted with white. However, the blooms are distinctly not akin to those seen there.

The provenance of this painting is uncertain. The rather eclectic mix of eastern Indian and Central Asian elements seems more related to the tradition of painting seen at Drathang than to Pala-style paintings. The inclusion of the uncanonical morning glories becomes particularly problematic when judging the painting to be of Indian origin. Equally, the physiognomies of the monks do not seem very Indian. However, several features seem to argue for an Indian provenance, for example, the unusual presence of Hindu deities in the lower left and the lithe quality of the drawing, most clearly displayed in the entire lower register. SMK

1 Banerjee 1994, p. 23.
2 See cat. no. 4, note 1.
3 See cat. no. 5, note 10.
4 See cat. no. 5, note. 3
5 See Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, pl. 9, p. 79, the Mahashri Tara in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
6 For example, a pair in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987.407.6 (11.7 x 4.6 cm), 1995.569.4ab (10.5 x 4.1 cm). On one of this pair of covers is an image of a lama (probably Atisha) wearing a pandit's hat and flanked by two lamas. On the other, Shadakshari Lokeshvara is flanked by two seated bodhisattvas, similar in pose to those in the Portrait of a Lama (cat. no. 5) and the Book Cover (cat. no. 8).
7 The Hindu deities Brahma, Indra, and Agni appear, for example, in one of Manjushri's mandalas, described in a medieval Sanskrit iconographic compendium, the *Nishpannayogavali*; see Mallmann 1964, pp. 92, and 174–79. See also Mallmann 1962, pp. 125–37.

8. Book Cover with the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata and Attendants

Central Tibet, late 11th–early 12th century
Distemper on wood
74 x 27.5 cm (29⅛ x 10⅞ in.)

Private collection



The quality of painting seen in this book cover is a testament to the extraordinary importance accorded to books and the recorded tradition in early Tibet. The inner surface of the cover is divided into three sections bordered on all sides by gold bands with alternating red and green lotus petals. In the center sits the bodhisattva Dharmodgata (inscribed *chos 'phags*) holding a wheel between his palms. His lotus seat rests in front of a throne back with a single crossbar held up by rampant *vyalas* astride elephants. On it sit addorsed *makaras* whose foliate tails twine behind the bodhisattva's aureole. The entire ensemble is framed by a larger aureole and is set within a shrine with a low tile roof that may reflect early Tibetan architecture. The roof shares features with the Serkhang at Shalu, built between about 1027 and 1045.[1] To the right of Dharmodgata is the seated bodhisattva Sadaprarudita (Always Weeping).[2] He sits on a similar throne base, also guarded by recumbent lions. One leg rests on the ground, tucked in close to the body, and the other is slightly raised and placed to the side. The torso and head are turned in the direction of the raised leg. In early Tibetan art variants of this pose are used repeatedly for attendant bodhisattvas.[3] Sadaprarudita sits against a pillow and his aureole is flanked by two yellow devices, which on careful examination can be seen to contain *hamsas* (geese) with elaborate tails, a substitute for the *torana* found in eastern Indian manuscripts. Sadaprarudita is also surrounded by a large aureole, and two cloud-borne vidyadharas, one holding a parasol and the other a fly whisk, fill the corners of his flower-strewn niche. The two bodhisattvas may illustrate an episode from the *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita*, in which the spiritual aspirant Sadaprarudita finally achieves bodhisattvahood in the presence of Dharmodgata.[4]

To Dharmodgata's left is a large kneeling figure surrounded by four attendants, all wearing crowns,



earrings, and long robes whose wide sleeves are banded with borders. Most probably they are historical figures. They all hold their hands in a gesture of adoration (*anjali mudra*), and stems of lotuses emerge from between their palms; in the central figure this has metamorphosed into a *triratna*, a symbol of the Buddha, his doctrine, and his followers. White outer robes (usually an indication of Buddhist lay worshipers) are worn by the main figure and his two flanking attendants, all of whom are set on lotus bases. Red robes (a sign of high rank) are worn by the two attendants above. The disposition of four figures around a large central one suggests a mandala.

Possibly, in hope of gaining merit toward his enlightenment, the central figure, whose pose mirrors that of Sadaprarudita, commissioned a *Prajnaparamita* manuscript with book covers, and this is the lone surviving part. Certainly the symmetric opposition of the divine bodhisattva and the crowned lay Buddhist, in like attitudes, each facing toward the bodhisattva Dharmodgata, would seem to imply this. Susan Huntington has suggested that the divine characteristics of halos and lotus seats accompanying lay donors in a Pala stela may "suggest that the individuals . . . conceive of themselves as having attained the certainty of being reborn in paradise, the promised benefit of meritorious works. . . ."[5]

The book cover is superbly rendered. The line is masterful, the proportions elegant, and the figures are lithe and enlivened by individuality. Even the *vyalas* and elephants in Dharmodgata's throne are unusually vibrant. The durable wood surface has allowed the pigments to survive largely intact. The colors are particularly varied, with a large number of subtle tones that include pale raspberry pinks, mint greens, an ocherlike saturated yellow, pale and slate blues. Like several other works in this exhibition, the book cover displays a number of anomalous characteristics that may associate it with the early mural tradition more than with the Bengali-inspired style. The presence of the single-tier throne back is uncharacteristic of the Bengali-inspired style, as is the presence of the lion guardians in the base shown fully and in profile. Finally, the disposition of the mandala-like ensemble of donor and attendants is reminiscent of the pentads of Tathagatas and *vajra* deities surrounding a central figure in the early Mandala of Vairochana (see fig. 13). Its format and style seem to point to a late-eleventh-century date and a Tibetan provenance, but they also serve to show how accomplished indigenous painting of the period could be. SMK

1 See Vitali 1990, pl. 47.
2 The inscription reads *rtag-tu ngu* (Takdu Ngu).
3 See, for example, cat. nos. 4, 5, and 10, where both legs are held tight to the body.
4 See Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1961, p. 309, in which it is noted that Atisha touched upon the life story of Sadaprarudita. See also Snellgrove 1987, p. 60.
5 Seattle 1990, p. 157.

9. Panel from a Buddhist Ritual Crown

Central Tibet, ca. late 11th–early 12th century
Distemper on wood
29.5 x 13 cm (11⅝ x 5⅛ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, The Vincent Astor Foundation Gift, 1997 (1997.152)



This panel depicts an enthroned Vairochana Buddha enclosed in a rainbow halo and surrounded by thick foliage. Most likely, it was the center section of a five-leaf crown worn by Buddhist priests during religious ceremonies. Vairochana (The Resplendent One) offers one of his characteristic gestures, the *bodhyagri*, while holding a thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*) in his right hand. The figure is exquisitely rendered, with subtle characterization, elegant body proportions, convincing three-dimensionality, and finely rendered details such as the curling tendrils of hair and the ovoid designs on the lower section of the skirt. The throne base is adorned with three jewels (*triratna*), a Buddhist symbol denoting the Buddha, his teachings (*dharma*), and the monastic community (*samgha*). Two lions flank the *triratna*, crouching in the interstices of the base. Directly above Vairochana and supported by foliage is a wheel (*chakra*), symbol of the particular family (*kula*) of universal powers and attributes associated with this deity.

Vairochana sometimes serves as the central deity in a mandala of the Five Celestial Buddhas, or Tathagatas. Each of the other four presides over one of the cardinal points of the compass: Akshobhya in the east, Amoghasiddhi in the north, Amitabha in the west, and Ratnasambhava in the south. Each of these Buddhas is also associated with one of the five afflictions (*panchaklesha*) of the human personality: confusion (*moha*), pride (*mana*), envy (*irsya*), hatred (*dvesha*), and desire (*raga*).[1] In Buddhist philosophy, these afflictions are said to obscure mankind's true nature, but through spiritual practice, they can be transformed into the wisdom of the Tathagata with whom they are associated. Tibetan Buddhists sometimes wore crowns adorned with figures of the five Tathagatas during Tantric rituals in which they—in deep meditative states—identified with the powers of the Tathagatas. Some initiations (*abhisheka*) into the mandala involve a "coronation," during which the initiate, wearing a crown (such as the one to which this panel once belonged) and other royal insignia, is sprinkled with water and accedes to the powers of the mandala.[2] A king rules the earth and its inhabitants; the Buddhist hierarch rules himself and exhibits mastery over his own life.

A complete and very fine late-fourteenth- to early-fifteenth-century Tibetan ritual crown, now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, was thought to be the earliest surviving example of painted ritual crowns when it was published in 1984.[3] In its materials it is typical of surviving crowns. The five painted and gilded panels are made of thick paper board and are attached along the bottom to a cloth. Another fifteenth-century example is now in the Newark Museum Collection.[4] Two wooden panels from a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century ritual crown and a complete nineteenth-century example are now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.[5] A late-twelfth- to fourteenth-century five-panel ceremonial crown survives from the Kharakhoto hoard, now in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. The Hermitage crown depicts five dakinis (Esoteric Buddhist goddesses) painted on thick paper. Hermitage curator Kira Samosiuk noted that "there are several such crowns in the Khara Khoto collection, some of paper, some of silk, some of wood, and varying widely in artistic manner. They bear images of the five Buddhas, the seven jewels of the *chakravartin*, the Eight Auspicious Objects, or dakinis. All were used for ritual purposes."[6] Gilles Béguin has written about such works and their relationship to metal crowns worn by Buddhist monks in Nepal and Tibet.[7]

In style, this panel can be compared closely with late-eleventh- or early-twelfth-century painting from central Tibet, notably the marvelous painted book cover featuring the bodhisattvas Dharmodgata and Sadaprarudita with a group of historical figures, perhaps lay donors (cat. no. 8). The figure of Vairochana is close to those of Dharmodgata and Sadaprarudita in body type, physiognomy, and jewelry design. This is the earliest crown fragment yet to emerge from central Tibet, and it is certainly one of the finest examples from any period. JCS

1 The five differ slightly in textual sources. There are many groups of five associated with the five Tathagatas, for example, the five components (*panchaskandha*). See Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, pp. 140–49.
2 Tucci 1973, p. 44. For other examples of ritual crowns, see Béguin 1983.
3 New York 1984, pp. 92–93.
4 Published in Reynolds, Heller, and Gyatso 1983, p. 145.
5 Published in Pal 1983, pp. 240–42.
6 Milan 1993, p. 178.
7 Béguin 1983.

10. Buddha with Attendants

Central Tibet (a Kadampa monastery?), early 12th century
Distemper on cloth
201.4 x 114 cm (79¼ x 44⅞ in.)
Private collection

This is the largest early Tibetan *thanka* known to survive, an exemplar of the size and majesty that these paintings could achieve. The basic format of the picture is typical: a large main figure flanked by two willowy standing bodhisattvas—in this case Padmapani to the right and Avalokiteshvara to the left—and a chorus of seated figures above them. Above the head of the Buddha are three lamas, probably Atisha (in the center) flanked by two abbots, both of whom wear monastic robes. Below the main figure is a row of five deities; four of them are seated against throne backs with the typical double upper rails surmounted by foliate scrolls. At the far right is a seated Green Tara in *lalitasana* (a posture of ease). To her right are two four-armed seated deities. The first is Shadakshari Lokeshvara flanked by two diminutive attendants: Manidhara (to his right) and Shakadakshari Mahavidya (to his left);[1] the second is possibly a four-armed yellow Manjushri. The fourth figure is a Buddha seated against a bolster backed by an architectural throne. He too is flanked by two small attendants, a ferocious kneeling red deity and perhaps another depiction of Shakadakshari Lokeshvara. Lastly, at the far left is a horrific standing figure of Mahakala trampling on a prostrate Ganesha (the elephant-headed son of Shiva). He is attended by a small kneeling donor figure wearing a simple monastic robe and assuming *anjali mudra*, the gesture of adoration, toward him.

Several features of the painting point to an early date. If the group of lamas above the Buddha is understood as an incipient lineage, like that seen in

the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3), this would seem to indicate a date of about 1100. The form of the Buddha's double lotus seat and the unusually tall and narrow nimbus are very close to those of the Kronos Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4), although the Buddha's halo is more ovoid. The standing attendant bodhisattvas, although much more attenuated, are closer to that early prototype—particularly in the balance of the masses—than to later examples where the forms become flattened and stylized. The chorus of ten listeners is also like in number to that seen in the Kronos painting: most later ones depict six or eight. It is interesting that the outer figures in the lower tier, although crowned, have neither an *ushnisha*, the cranial protuberance indicative of transcendent wisdom, nor the tall chignon usually associated with bodhisattvas (see also cat. nos. 1, 4). This difference would seem to indicate that the chorus was composed of a variety of divine beings (also, perhaps, bodhisattvas, in different states of progress toward enlightenment). Despite these connections, the Buddha lacks the spatial coherence of the earlier picture and points the way to later derivations of the eastern Indian style. The central position of Atisha and the two flanking monks would seem to justify an attribution to a Kadampa monastery. SMK

1 Mallmann 1948, pp. 173–75.



10: Detail



11. Double Portrait

Central Tibet (a Kadampa monastery?), second quarter of the 12th century
Distemper on cloth
53.3 x 39.4 cm (21 x 15½ in.)
Private collection

Judging from the overall style, the form of particular motifs, and the length of the lineage shown, this is a rare example of a painting from the second quarter of the twelfth century. At the center is a portrayal of two lamas in religious discourse. A short lineage appears above, and the consecrating monk with protective deities below. Between the aureoles of the two figures, a small lama—most probably their guru—is borne on a lotus, and to either side vidyadharas (bearers of wisdom) play percussion instruments. The principal lamas are particularly well drawn and volumetric; they have not yet become stylized and flattened. Note the portraitlike quality of their heads and the subtle way in which the normally formalized outlines of the robes are adjusted to show the fabric bunching behind the necks, falling over the feet, and gently twisting to reveal the inner side of the brocade. The main figures are seated on unusual thrones with single back rails, like those seen in the section of a ritual crown and on the early book cover (see cat. nos. 8, 9). Atypically, pleated fabric falls from the ends of the crossbar, which is topped by a foliate device that trails along the bar and climbs the side of the halo. It is more elaborate than similar motifs seen in the early-thirteenth-century Tathagata series but more restrained than that seen in the Ford Tara (cat. nos. 23, 3). The aureoles of both lamas are enclosed in trilobate arches surrounded by trees like those seen in the section of a crown (cat. no. 9) and in Bengali manuscripts.[1] Stylized lions appear on the base of the thrones, but their companion elephants are lacking. The whole presents an eclectic mix of elements associated with the style of the Bengali-inspired early Kadampa paintings and those deriving from other Pala prototypes.

The upper register portrays, from left to right, Atisha wearing his Indian pandit's hat, Dromton with curly hair and secular clothes, a wide-eyed siddha seated on an antelope skin holding a skull cup (*kapala*), and two additional lamas. The figures are set against a dark blue ground decorated with foliate devices and pendant jewels. At the far left of the bottom register the consecrating monk is seated on a mat and framed by a throne back of a type seen in Bengali manuscripts as well as in some early paintings in the exhibition (cat. nos. 2, 3).[2] The tall offering stand also seems to be an early feature and can be compared with those in the same pictures: by the late twelfth century a squatter type seems to be typical (cat. nos. 19, 20). To the right are four deities set within aureoles: Buddha with a begging bowl, Shadakshari Lokeshvara, the Green Tara, and Avalokiteshvara. All five figures are set against an upper border of swags of pendant jewels. SMK

1 In those, there are usually two trees; here a central jewel ornament makes assessment difficult.
2 This type of throne continued to be copied. See, for example, cat. no. 19 and cat. no. 7, note 5, for references to mats in Pala manuscripts.



11: Detail



12. Eleven-Headed, One-Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara

Central Tibet (a Kagyu monastery), mid-12th century
Distemper on cloth
38.1 x 29.5 cm (15 x 11⅝ in.)
Private collection

In this compelling iconographic form, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who embodies compassion, sees and reaches out in all directions to assist those in need. In Tibet, he is called Chenresi. His eleven heads, which can be interpreted as corresponding to the eleven points of a mandala (its center, four cardinal points, four intermediate points, nadir, and zenith), are arranged in five registers. The lowest, displaying peaceful countenances, is surmounted by three levels of wrathful forms; the peaceful Buddha Amitabha is at the top. Each head represents an aspect of the compassionate deity, even the wrathful forms, which reflect Avalokiteshvara's ability to meet ferocious powers with comparable strength, although his heart remains full of compassion.[1] His arms, intended to represent the auspicious number one thousand, stretch around him like a wide halo, each bearing an eye to symbolize his unhindered capacity to see. The outstretched hands poignantly suggest an immediate association between the deity's perception of his devotees' needs and his willingness to extend himself to relieve their suffering.

Avalokiteshvara stands on a lotus platform that he shares with two diminutive six-armed protective deities. A scrolling vine emerges from the lotus base and forms a backdrop for the six bodhisattvas, three on either side, who attend to the deity's teachings.[2] This flowering vine rises from behind them and climbs up both sides of the painting, scrolling behind Avalokiteshvara. Vidyadharas borne by clouds surround his heads and upper halo; they carry parasols (symbols of royalty or dignitaries) and cymbals (proclaiming his teachings). In the top corners of the *thanka* two groups, each with three figures, are set within lotus-petal borders. On the left is the historical Buddha flanked by two monks dressed in Tibetan-style robes. They are identified by fragmentary inscriptions. One can be read as Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170). On the right, probably, is Songtsen Gampo (d. ca. 649), the first Tibetan ruler of the historical period, flanked by his Chinese and Nepalese wives. From an early period, Songtsen Gampo, who was instrumental in introducing Buddhism to Tibet, was identified as an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. His Chinese and Nepalese wives, who also played important roles in bringing Buddhism from their native lands, were thought to be the White and Green Taras.[3] Two other forms of Avalokiteshvara appear beneath these groupings: Shadakshari Lokeshvara to the left and Mahakaruna to the right.

The style and iconography of the painting seem to derive mainly from Indian models. This includes the basic approach to drawing and color as well as such minor elements as the shapes of the faces and the jewelry types. However, exact Indian pictorial prototypes have not survived. Although Central Asian images of the deity from Dunhuang exist, the earliest painting of a thousand-armed Lokeshvara in the Indic world is on a Nepalese palm-leaf manuscript page dated 1015 (in the Asiatic Society of Calcutta [no. vii]).[4]

The style and dress of the main deities derive from eastern Indian prototypes, but the costumes of the figures in the top vignettes hark back to styles seen in late-eleventh-century Tibetan murals. The Buddha's saffron shawl is arranged in a distinctive manner; his right shoulder is covered by a small piece of the cloth, while a wide area of the fabric spills over his left side and is hiked up by a clasp so that its inner red-lined face is exposed and falls in symmetric pleats across his chest. Underneath he is wearing a black robe with long tubular sleeves and a round neck. The monks wear red shawls that also cover the right shoulder and then are drawn around and over the left side to allow a diagonal slit of chest to be seen. They wear yellow vests with V-shaped openings. Similarly, the dress of Songtsen Gampo and his queens is archaic and compares with garments seen in the Drathang murals. The king wears a green jacket with flaring sleeves, pushed back to reveal his forearms. His long inner robe, whose hem is gathered up around him, has tubular sleeves. The inner robe, like those of his companions, is patterned with gold devices (perhaps a Chinese brocade) and is secured around his waist by a wide pleated cummerbund. He wears a turban, and his ears are distended by the weight of his large earplugs. His wives wear similar robes, and their wide headbands are open on top. The closest parallel for all these modes of dress seems to be the Drathang murals, which Vitali dates to 1081–93.[5]

The dating of this painting to the mid-twelfth century is suggested by the figure of the Kagyu mas-



ter Phakmo Drupa in the top register. His presence clarifies a somewhat eclectic mélange that combines figures with stylistic proximity to works from eastern India and others in archaic costumes of the late eleventh century. These elements, and the absence of a lineage, would otherwise point to a somewhat earlier date. The quality of the drawing of the central figure, where iconometric rules undoubtedly governed proportions, is quite fine, but the subordinate figures, especially those in the lower register, are not as accomplished and show exaggerated postures. Overall, the drawing is not so fine as that in some of the other early Bengali-style *thankas* we have discussed. A Tibetan provenance is likely. SMK

1 Mallmann 1986, p. 112; see also Chandra 1988.
2 The artist seems to be depicting—going by the various hair and cranial formations—bodhisattvas of different spiritual levels. See as well cat. no. 4, note 1.
3 Note that the woman on the right has a green complexion. Other early portraits of this king show him wearing a cloth turban, often with a head of the Buddha Amitabha at its zenith (an iconographic feature frequently borne by Avalokiteshvara, as in this painting), and flanked by two women. See a portrait statue of Songtsen Gampo in the Potala, published in New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, p. 41.
4 See Saraswati 1977, no. 244; see also Mallmann 1948, pp. 154–56.
5 Vitali 1990, pls. 29, 34. Elements of the clothing's style originate ultimately in Central Asia, some going as far back as the early ninth century (Khocho). These include features such as the V-necked undergarment, the small lappet of shawl covering the right shoulder, the monk's shawl swung across the body, the long-sleeved robe worn by the Buddha, and even the pleated fabric falling from his shoulder. However, the costumes in our *thanka*, perhaps because of the painting's small scale and later date, miss many of the subtleties of the Drathang murals. None of the costumes has the patterned bands at the hems or the hooks that suspend the pleated fabric falling over the chests of the figures in the murals.

13. Vairochana and Attendants

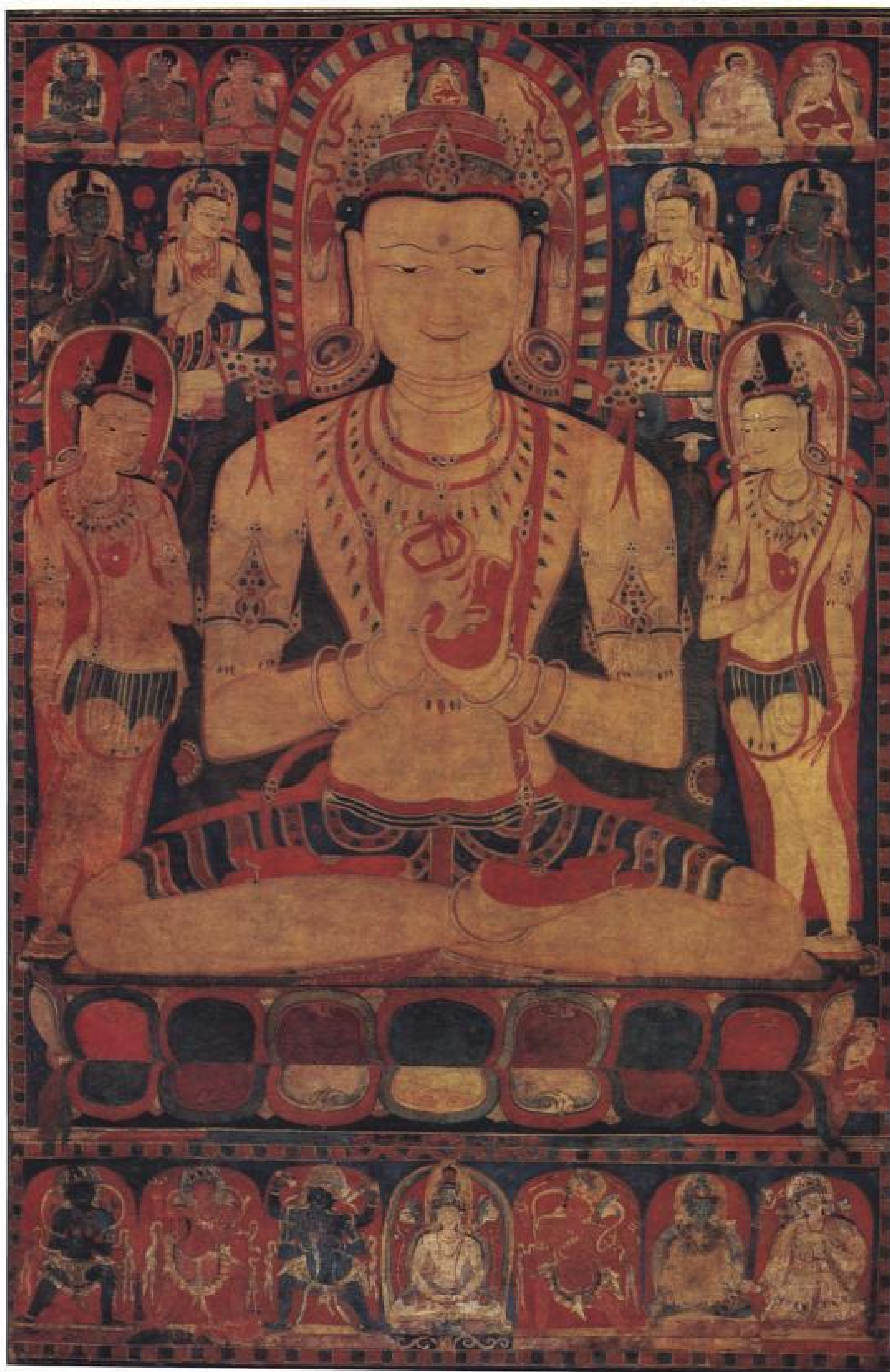
Central Tibet, ca. 1150–1200
Distemper on cloth
111 x 73 cm (43¾ x 28¾ in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund (1989.104)

The Celestial Buddha Vairochana holds a small thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*) as he assumes one of his characteristic gestures, the *bodhyagri mudra*.[1] Two standing and four seated bodhisattvas surround the central figure; seven protector deities fill the bottom register. The top register includes spiritual teachers associated with the Kagyu monastic order (from left to right): the celestial progenitor Vajradhara; the Indian yogin Tilopa (fl. late 10th–early 11th century); Tilopa's Indian disciple Naropa (956–1040); his Tibetan disciple Marpa (1012–1097); Marpa's disciple Milarepa (1040–1123); and Gampopa (1079–1153), Milarepa's chief disciple. Gampopa's greatest disciple was Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170), who is portrayed, perhaps, as the diminutive figure in Vairochana's crown. The Tibetan monk in the gesture of religious instruction (*dharmachakra mudra*), at the right of Vairochana's lotus seat, was probably a disciple of Phakmo Drupa and the commissioner of the painting.

Although it is not uncommon for a Buddhist deity to bear an image of a spiritual superior in his crown, a human image is rarely found in such an elevated position. This unusual iconography reflects the extreme reverence Tibetans traditionally granted their religious teachers.[2] Indeed, the Tibetan historian Go Lotsawa (1392–1481) frequently describes religious figures in terms of the deities whom they are said to embody.

Amidst Go Lotsawa's typically hagiological prose, Phakmo Drupa stands out as a particularly remarkable teacher. Go describes him as the "second Buddha."[3] Phakmo Drupa apparently shared this view when he "openly proclaimed that he was the Buddha of the Past and Future, as well as the Sakyendra [Buddha] of the Present Age."[4] The presence of Phakmo Drupa (if indeed it is he) in Vairochana's crown reflects Tantric meditation practices, known as *guru yoga*, in which the student visualizes his teacher as the embodiment of all spiritual wisdom, the person from whom spiritual guidance is drawn. The privileged placement of a spiritual teacher indicates that this painting might have been commissioned by a disciple of Phakmo Drupa, for whom this master was greater than all the Buddhas. JCS



1 The gesture differs slightly from usual renditions (see Mallmann 1975, no. 2, pl. 11). Mallmann notes that Vairochana is sometimes associated with Vajrasattva, who holds the *vajra*, and this association may explain the *vajra*'s presence here (Mallmann 1975, pp. 392–93). While Vairochana is most often white-complexioned, textual sources describe him assuming other colors, including gold and yellow, as he appears in this painting (Mallmann 1975, p. 393).

2 A related instance can be seen in a ca. twelfth-century Tibetan painting that depicts the eighth-century Indian master Padmasambhava within the sanctified inner circles of a mandala (see New York 1997, pp. 78–79).

3 Roerich 1979, p. 563.

4 Ibid.

14. Panjara Mahakala

Central Tibet (Sakya order), ca. 1200
Distemper on cloth
76.5 x 59 cm (30⅛ x 23¼ in.)
Private collection

Panjara Mahakala stands at the center of a lotus, holding the ritual knife (*kartrika*) and skull cup (*kapala*); a ritual baton (*gandi*) rests in the crooks of his arms. His feet press heavily on a corpse, with which Mahakala, as Lord of Death, is symbolically associated. A tiger skin, secured beneath his corpulent abdomen, covers Mahakala's left thigh. He wears a crown bearing five skulls, and a lengthy garland of severed heads falls from his shoulders almost to his ankles. A narrow white scarf encircles the god's upper torso, shading to yellow as it winds inside the crooks of his arms and then into symmetrical horseshoe shapes that terminate in green folds that flank his calves. A snake, with head poised near Mahakala's left ear, coils its long body around the god's abdomen. Two red snakes twist like corkscrews inside the god's earrings, two more loop menacingly around the cloth tassels of his crown, and yet another winds sinuously around his neck.

The origins and significance of this form of Mahakala are not yet fully understood. He is sometimes described as "Lord of the Tent" (*gur gyi mgon po*), although, as Tucci argued in 1941, this epithet is almost certainly a misnomer. Confusion arose over interpretation of the Tibetan word *gur*, usually "tent," but in this context meant to convey another meaning, associated with the Sanskrit term *panjara*. As Tucci explains, *panjara* is more accurately translated as "cage" or "cage [of bones]," that is, "skeleton."[1] In Tibetan texts, Mahakala is often known as *rdo rje nag po chen po gur gyi mgon po* or *Vajra mahakala panjara natha*, "The Adamantine Great [Lord of] Death, The Lord (*natha*) of the Cage [of bones] (*panjara*)." Not so much "Lord of the Tent," as his recent interpretation has suggested, but more likely, in Tucci's words, "the God of the cemeteries, or, symbolically, the God who helps destroying [*sic*] the corporeal cages in which ignorance keeps us prisoners."[2]

Textual descriptions of the god evoke the frightening vision that lies behind Panjara Mahakala's iconography and its funereal symbolism: he is surrounded by one hundred thousand birds flapping their wings; one hundred thousand jackals, mouths opened wide to express hunger; one hundred thousand dark men heaving sighs toward heaven; one hundred thousand Garuda birds in flight.[3]

In this work, the god appears at the center of a great cemetery, with jackals, hungry dogs, birds of prey, and lowly demons depicted against Mahakala's fiery halo. Just beyond this halo, against a dark background, are animals feeding on human corpses. Panjara Mahakala is flanked on his right by two male attendants, Bhutadamara Vajrapani and Bhagavat Mahakala; and on his left by two female attendants, Ekajati, with a vase of elixir, and Kamadhatvishvara (a form of Shridevi), riding a mule. Beneath Kamadhatvishvara is Putra Nakpo (the Dark Son), dressed in black silk and holding a long saber and a skull cup "filled with hot brains and blood."[4] Yama, also known by the epithet "Lord of Death," rides a buffalo and wields a baton beneath Bhagavat Mahakala.

Tucci notes that Panjara Mahakala is also associated with upholding justice and ensuring that oaths and vows are fulfilled.[5] Those who fail to do so are destined to meet an unhappy fate: One of Panjara Mahakala's attendants holds "a skull filled with the marrow and blood of those who have violated their promises," and another holds "the heart of a man who violated a promise."[6] However, just as he punishes those who transgress, this god protects those who uphold their vows and promises. Said to emerge from Panjara Mahakala's staff is an army of deities



who protect the righteous: blowing on thigh bones, flinging lassos made of human entrails, waving weapons and flags, these ferocious deities can be seen in the bottom register, along with a standing monk and a monk seated before ritual offerings.[7]

The staff was probably used in monasteries to mark the hours (by beating on a bell or a drum); it may be a relatively late addition to this figure's iconography. Tucci interpreted it as a baton used to reprimand, underscoring Mahakala's role as the "god of justice, who governs the oath and watches over the fulfillment of vows and promises. . . . In Buddhism the promise becomes the supreme vow . . . of pursuing supreme enlightenment."[8] To neglect this vow is to fall again into *samsara*, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—over which Panjara Mahakala, as Lord of Death, also presides.

The introduction of this iconography to Tibet is attributed to the famed translator Rinchen Sangpo (958–1055), who had a vision of this deity while in a cemetery near Bodh Gaya. There, he heard "a fearful sound as though two tigers had leapt on a large human corpse and were devouring it."[9] He later returned to the main temple at Bodh Gaya. There, after three more days, he "beheld the form of Mahakala in the act of trampling upon a dwarf and holding a knife and a skull, one above the other, level with his heart, and a *ganti* [*gandi*] held central in his hands."[10] Mahakala spoke to Rinchen Sangpo, saying he would return to Tibet with him to protect the Buddhist faith.

Rinchen Sangpo may be in the top register, the fifth figure from the left, next to an Indian teacher, perhaps Atisha (the fourth figure from the left), credited by the Sakya order with introducing many important teachings from Vikramashila monastery. Also in the top register are Vajradhara, two mahasiddhas, and Tibetan monks. Those wearing red hats are probably members of the Sakya order: for them, Panjara Mahakala was a special protector deity. Without inscriptions, it is impossible to ascertain the identity of all the figures represented in this lineage. However, the three figures with white outer robes—worn by those who were not yet fully ordained monks—further support a Sakya order association, since novices were a crucial part of the Sakya hierarchy. These figures are probably members of the Khon clan, some of whose sons later assumed positions in the celibate Sakya order hierarchy (represented in the top register by the red-robed monks wearing yellow outer robes).[11] It is interesting to note that the Sakya order, which by the middle of the thirteenth century had established close ties with Newari painters, commissioned such earlier works as this, which is more closely associated with the stylistic and iconographic traditions of eastern India. JCS

1 Tucci, *Gyantse*, 1989, pp. 124–25.
2 Ibid., p. 125.
3 Ibid., p. 128.
4 Kelényi 1994, p. 94; see also Tucci, *Gyantse*, 1989, pp. 124–25.
5 Tucci, *Gyantse*, 1989, p. 127.
6 Ibid., pp. 129–30.
7 Ibid., p. 131.
8 Ibid., p. 127.
9 Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977–80, vol. 2, p. 99.
10 Ibid.
11 See Kossak 1997, p. 31.

15. Buddha with Five Tathagatas

Central Tibet (a Kagyu monastery?), early 13th century
Distemper on cloth
42.9 x 32.7 cm (16⅞ x 12⅞ in.)
Private collection

This painting depicts a Buddha in the gesture of religious instruction (*dharmachakra mudra*). He sits on an elaborate five-tier throne, surrounded by a five-arc rainbow. His two-tier throne back is surmounted by a triangular element whose details have largely worn away. Careful scrutiny reveals delicately drawn addorsed *hamsas* (geese) and filigree scrolling crowned by a Garuda. A cloth emerges from beneath his lotus perch; it bears the *triratna* (three jewels), denoting the Buddha, his teachings (*dharma*), and the monastic community (*samgha*). The uppermost level of the throne is guarded by the ever-recurring lions and elephants. The throne is an elaborate version of the one seen in the Kronos Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 4) and the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait (cat. no. 5). The number of tiers is increased here, but the basic form, deriving from eastern Indian models, is retained: a central projection with a series of stepped setbacks. Also alike are the profiles of the tiers and the triangular antefixes. Side panels, which support the two-tier



throne back, contain badly worn depictions of *vyalas* astride elephants. The gem-studded surface of the throne is enlivened with swirling golden patterns, which in early paintings imply water, but here read as filigree. The base of the throne is inset with three pairs of double *vajras* tipped with a *triratna* that alternate with more typical motifs. The Buddha is flanked by the standing bodhisattvas Manjushri (on his right) and Vajrapani (on his left). Two vidyadharas ("garland" or "knowledge" bearers) float on clouds in the top corners, while five Buddhas identical to the main deity are seated on the first tier of his throne.

An elegant drawing on the reverse of the painting clarifies some of the iconography (see fig. 34). In place of the usual consecratory mantras, an umbrella with streamers atop two lotus seats appears. Lined up along the lower seat and corresponding to the positions of the five lower Buddhas are symbols associated with the five Tathagatas (Celestial Buddhas): a jewel, symbol of Ratnasambhava; a thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*), symbol of Akshobhya; a wheel, symbol of Vairochana; a lotus, symbol of Amitabha; and a thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*), symbol of Amoghasiddhi. The upper lotus support corresponds to the seat of the main image and contains a petal-spoked stylized wheel at whose center is a *vajra* tied with streamers, set on another lotus base. The upper part of the drawing implies that the central figure of the painting is Vairochana, whose family head is Akshobhya, hence the thunderbolt at the center of a wheel.[1] The *mudra* that the central figure makes is also characteristic of Vairochana, who is considered in most instances to be the presiding deity of the pentad of Tathagatas, who, therefore, appear below him. However, it is unusual for a deity to be shown twice in the same painting and for other figures to assume the *mudra* of Vairochana. Another possibility is that this central figure is one or the other of the two Buddhas who preside over the five Tathagatas, either Vajrasana or Vajrasattva. However, neither the hand gesture nor the symbols behind the Buddha tend to support this hypothesis.[2] Finally, the central figure might be Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, who is sometimes shown making *dharmachakra mudra*, the "turning of the wheel of the law," and from whom the concept of the Tathagatas may have arisen.[3] Although the wheel on the reverse of the painting is associated with him, the *vajra* is not appropriate for the historical Buddha. Therefore, the identity of the central figure of this Esoteric assemblage remains uncertain.

Despite their initially disparate visual impact (because of the worn condition of the *thanka* and the associated loss in color depth), the style and decorative motifs of this painting are related to those of several other early-thirteenth-century paintings in the exhibition.[4] The body of the central figure, with his thin neck, exaggerated widow's peak, wiglike hair, small *ushnisha* (cranial protuberance indicative of wisdom) topped with a jewel, and delicate limbs, is akin to that of the Shakyamuni Buddha (cat. no. 16). The standing bodhisattvas are very like those in the Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17); note not only the similar distribution of weight of the figures but also the particular angle at which the heads are held. A similar angle also occurs in the kneeling yellow figure in the Shakyamuni *thanka*. The Buddha and the hierarch both share the use of multiple rainbows, the atypical panel supports that hold up the throne back, *vajras* (thunderbolt scepters) used as decorative devices, as well as a highly unusual small border motif of intermeshing triangular elements. Finally, all three pictures have a throne cloth with a *triratna* at its center (the portrait uses this symbol also as a major decorative device). The lineage in the hierarch's portrait determines the dating of the group. SMK

1 Mallman 1986, p. 392.
2 Ibid., p. 130. Vajrasana is associated with the earth-touching *mudra*. Vajrasattva holds a bell and a *vajra* and usually wears elaborate regalia; Mallmann 1986, pp. 419–20.
3 Bhattacharyya 1958, p. 48.
4 Also closely associated with these is a Samvara and Nairatmya with footprints (see Pal 1984, no. 12), which shares an almost identical lineage and many of the same motifs as the Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17).

16. Seated Shakyamuni Buddha

Central Tibet (a Kagyu monastery), early 13th century
Distemper on cloth
32 x 25.5 cm (12⅝ x 10 in.)
Private collection



Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, is shown seated on a lotus that rests on a typical double-tier Bengali-style throne backed by a pipal tree, symbolic of Bodh Gaya, the place of his enlightenment. He is flanked by kneeling bodhisattvas: to the right is a fierce form of Vajrapani with a *vajra* (thunderbolt scepter) floating above his raised hand; to the left, a yellow figure holds a begging bowl, and a *stupa* bearing the figure of a Buddha is just behind his halo. Above the Vajrapani is a covered bowl, or censer, whose lid is being forced open by an emerging vine. The bowl is surmounted by a small seated Buddha. Across the top of the painting are eleven seated Buddhas, all but one set against red nimbi. Two are placed below the main register. Their iconography is somewhat unclear. The central figure, placed against a white rather than a red background, is probably Vairochana, appropriately set above Shakyamuni, as he is the head of his line. On either side of the top ledge of the throne base are offerings, tended by two seated goddesses. In the bottom register are the four lokapalas, guardians of the directions, wearing Tang-style armor. At their center is a ferocious figure, kneeling and holding a staff above his head with his right hand and a censer with his left.[1]

The style of this painting is related to that of the Buddha with Five Tathagatas and the Buddhist Hierarch (cat. nos. 15, 17). Similarities include the proportions and physiognomy of the main image, the *triratna* (three jewels) on the throne cloth, and the strange, elaborate iconography, which is puzzling here. Five of the Buddhas, including the Vairochana and the small image above the fierce Vajrapani, wear their robes atypically, with both shoulders covered, and all make the same gesture of exposition. Claudine Bautze-Picron claims that this mode of attire is meant to signify the historical Buddha teaching.[2] Another possibility is that they represent the five Tathagatas, who are shown in the related *thanka* (cat. no. 15) in identical poses and attire, except that there the robe is worn off the shoulder. The other Buddhas, all with the right shoulder bare, make a series of *mudras* that can be associated with the historical Buddha: *bhumisparsha mudra*, the earth-touching gesture, which is sometimes combined with a preaching gesture; *dhyana mudra*, a meditative gesture; and *dharmachakra mudra*, the gesture made by the central figure (the hand position in this case cannot be absolutely determined because of losses, but this seems most likely). The identity of the kneeling yellow bodhisattva is unclear, as is that of the fierce



16: Detail

figure at the center of the bottom register. The Tang style of the directional guardians is unique in my experience. SMK

1 There is a consecration by Onpo Lama Rinpoche on the reverse as well as a long inscription in the shape of a *stupa*. A substantial number of paintings of an earlier date were consecrated by Onpo Lama Rinpoche of Taklung monastery. For example, see cat. nos. 18, 20. For further discussion, see Singer 1997, in Singer and Denwood 1997, p. 299 n. 19.

2 Bautze-Picron 1995–96, p. 360.

17. Buddhist Hierarch

Central Tibet (a Kagyu monastery), early 13th century
Distemper on cloth
59.1 x 57.2 cm (23¼ x 22½ in.)
Pritzker Collection

An enthroned Kagyu Buddhist master in the gesture of religious discourse (*dharmachakra mudra*) is the subject of this extraordinarily rendered painting. His double-lotus seat rests on a two-tier throne base of typical pattern—except for its unusually rich surface decoration. The throne back is supported by panels enclosing *vyalas* astride elephants. The ensemble is surmounted by an aureole with foliate-tailed addorsed *makaras* and a Garuda with outstretched wings. Three rainbows form an arc around the lama, and two flanking bodhisattvas stand against the outer one. From the upper tier of the throne base, the ubiq-



uitous stylized lions and elephants (see cat. no. 5) peer out between struts emblazoned with *vajras* (ritual thunderbolts). The corners of this level are further supported by *nagarajas* (serpent deities). The lower tier is held aloft by a meandering lotus scroll that emanates from a vase set on a pair of crossed *vajras* at the bottom center of the composition. The twining lotus vines enclose a series of deities that includes, from left to right, Mahakala, Vaishravana, Hayagriva, Achala, Manjushri (probably), and Palden Lhamo. Smaller lotus scrolls on the sides of the painting enclose, left register, top to bottom: a siddha with his consort (Ghantapa or Carbaripa?), the siddha Dombipa seated on his lion, a siddha dancing with two females, the siddha Kukkuripa with his dog, and a blue Achala; right register, top to bottom: Shakyamuni with two adepts, the siddha Naropa (probably) with begging bowl, Vajrasattva (hands crossed at chest), the siddha Udhalipa (flying), and a dancing dakini. The top of the painting has a typical Kagyu lineage, through the charismatic Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170), with the beard. The hierarch directly above the central figure may have been one of Phakmo Drupa's disciples, but his identity is unclear.

The decorative motifs used in this painting are highly unusual and are based on two important Buddhist symbols: the *triratna*, three jewels (see cat. no. 15), and the *chintamani*, the wish-fulfilling jewel. The lotus-and-jewel frieze that typically accompanies the architectural elements of the throne is here replaced by a series of double-lotus bases of different colors that cradle blue *triratnas* engulfed in golden flames. The flames extend upward and largely obscure the upper cove moldings, whose profiles are nonetheless visible. Curiously, a *triratna* surrounded by flames is drawn on the back of the painting (see fig. 35), and another *triratna*, this time surrounded by golden lotus buds, is shown on the throne cloth. The uprights of the throne are also atypically decorated with *vajras*. The sides of the painting have borders of lotus bases supporting single jewels. This same motif also surrounds the deities in the bottom and side registers. Single and triple flaming jewels set on lotus-petal bases are also used to represent the lotus flowers that fill the borders and are used in decorative details throughout the painting. At the very edge of the *thanka* is an interlocking border of Central Asian derivation.[1]

Some of the stylistic elements in this *thanka* are related to those of several paintings in the exhibition, and it is in some ways particularly close to the Buddha with Five Tathagatas (cat. no. 15). The lineage surrounding the main figure is identical—with the exception of one of the siddhas in the right register—to a previously published *thanka* of Samvara and his consort.[2] However, the painting stands apart as one of the greatest virtuoso displays of early Tibetan painting. Its jewellike palette of rich blues, reds, whites, and yellows supplemented by softer tones is well preserved, and gold has been used for decorative effect to an extent and with success unequaled in any other work. Some of the pigment has been built up into tiny mounds and then gilded, creating rows of reflective beads, a technique that is rarely used at this early date (see fig. 41). SMK

1 The same border appears on cat. no. 15.
2 Pal 1984, no. 12.



17: Detail

18. Portrait of Taklung Thangpa Chenpo

Central Tibet (Taklung monastery), ca. 1200
Distemper on cloth
47 x 37 cm (18½ x 14⅝ in.)
Private collection



This *thanka* portrays Taklung Thangpa Chenpo (1142–1210), also known as Tashipel, the Buddhist hierarch who founded Taklung monastery in 1180.[1] It is one of the earliest surviving portraits of the Taklung founder and might have been painted during his lifetime. Its style is closely related to that seen in another painting of Tashipel, almost certainly painted during his lifetime and now in the Musée Guimet, Paris, where he is flanked by drawings of his own feet.[2] Frontal depictions, such as that adopted for this portrait, enable the viewer to meet the gaze of the figure portrayed, a practice known in India as *darshan*, whereby teachings are transmitted when the eyes of a disciple meet those of a spiritual teacher.[3]

In portraying revered hierarchs, Tibetan artists borrowed from iconographic traditions previously developed for depictions of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities (see pp. 14–15 above). In this painting, Tashipel assumes the gesture of religious instruction (*dharmachakra mudra*), typically seen in portrayals of celestial figures. His elongated earlobes and the golden wheels on the soles of his feet are also physical signs (*lakshana*) of his supernal nature. Tashipel is seated on a type of throne that originated in India, where it signifies the assemblage of natural and supernatural forces and their obeisance to the figure who sits upon it.[4] Moreover, the enthroned Tashipel appears within a mountain cave, a sacred site for gods



18: Detail

and ascetics, with ancient roots in Indian myth—yet another setting rich with significance and deemed to be commensurate with his spiritual accomplishments.

An important aspect of Tashipel's portrayal is the depiction of his spiritual lineage. This is a prominent feature of many early portraits of hierarchs, typically placed along the top and side borders. The purpose of this series of teachers was to demonstrate the founder's association with a reliable, authoritative lineage of *dharma* masters, extending from his own teacher to the much revered Indian masters. In this painting, one finds in the left corner of the top register the celestial progenitor Vajradhara, followed by Tilopa, Naropa, and (omitting the figure directly above Tashipel) Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa. Tashipel's revered teacher, Phakmo Drupa, appears directly above him; this placement emphasizes the direct transmission of Phakmo Drupa's teachings to his disciple.

Under Tashipel's leadership, it is said, Taklung monastery was home to as many as three thousand disciples.[5] In the bottom register, a narrative depiction of a monastic community is set against a sylvan landscape. In the center is a large, single-storied structure with three windows, each revealing a monk—perhaps a meditation hall with a portrait of Tashipel in the center window. Other monastic buildings surround it, and on the right is a grass meditation hut enclosed by more Tibetan structures. On the left is the painting's offerant, who holds a lotus flower as he sits before two golden *stupas* (reliquaries), symbols of the Buddha's enlightenment.

A rainbow, surmounted by a thatched roof placed within a mountain cave, encloses the upper portion of the throne back. The significance of the mountain cave has been mentioned; the thatched hut might refer to an episode noted in Taklung histories: Tashipel's master, testing the fortitude of his disciple, instructed him to build—in a single day—a willow hut for meditation.[6] Figures in the top and side registers are also presented within mountain caves, and the painting is bordered by mountain staves.

The composition of this painting demands careful analysis, for its rich details are not immediately apparent. Tashipel sits on a throne guarded by *vyalas*. The two-tier base consists of three receding planes. The central plane—which is closest to the viewer—is covered with a cloth and is flanked by a receding plane colored light green (in the upper tier) and pale blue (in the lower tier). One further receding plane flanks the latter, colored red in the upper tier and white in the lower tier. Lions are stationed between the posts that divide the two tiers. The throne itself rests on multicolored horizontal staves that denote a mountain setting. The throne back consists of flanking posts fashioned out of *vyalas* atop elephants and two crossbars, the top one surmounted by flanking crocodilian creatures (*makaras*); the talismanic mythic bird, Garuda, perches above Tashipel's head. The throne is encrusted with multicolored and variously shaped gems, reminiscent of the gem-encrusted gilt bronze sculptures that were also produced in Tibet at this time. JCS

1 The identity of the central figure is clear from both an inscription on the back, which offers obeisance to the revered teacher Tashipel (*om ah namo guru ratna mangalashri hum/*), and an analysis of the spiritual lineage of teachers and disciples in the painting's top register.
2 Published in Béguin 1990, pp. 20–21; Béguin and Colinart 1995, pp. 227–29; Singer and Denwood 1997, pl. 36, pp. 52–54.
3 Eck 1985.
4 Auboyer 1949, pp. 105–68. Although the history of portraiture in medieval India is poorly understood, it is interesting to note a ca. twelfth-century Indian stone sculpture, now in the Pritzker collection, that depicts an enthroned Indian ascetic, identified by the inscription as Vidyashiva. This image has been published in Bhattacharya 1994, pp. 93–99.
5 Roerich 1979, p. 620.
6 Roerich 1979, p. 561.

19. Portrait of Sangye Yarjon, Third Abbot of Taklung

Central Tibet (Taklung monastery), ca. 1250
Distemper on cloth
Without mounts: 32.4 x 25.4 cm (12¾ x 10 in.)

The Kronos Collections

This jewellike portrait depicts Sangye Yarjon (1203–1272), the third abbot of Taklung monastery,[1] who is seated on a throne very similar to that seen in the earlier Tashipel portrait (cat. no. 18). Indeed, the entire composition resembles that of the earlier portrait but with important exceptions. Whereas the earlier painting portrays the Taklung founder and first abbot in frontal view, this painting depicts the third abbot's head in three-quarter profile. It is as yet uncertain whether frontal or profile views in portraiture had any particular significance to Tibetan artists and patrons.

The soles of Sangye Yarjon's feet and the palms of his hands are henna colored, and golden wheels mark their centers. Although not seen in the earlier Tashipel portrait, these features are typically associated with depictions of deities and portraits of hierarchs. Sangye Yarjon's right hand is held in the earth-touching gesture (*bhumisparsha mudra*), often associated with the historical Buddha's calling upon the earth to witness his right to—and subsequent attainment of—enlightenment. Such iconographic conventions, powerful indications of the high esteem in which this hierarch was held, first evolved in India for the depiction of Buddhist divinities, but Tibetans used them in portrayals of revered teachers. Surrounding Sangye Yarjon are other monks in the Taklung lineage, as well as deities linked with this branch of the Kagyu order. Like many works seen thus far, these subsidiary figures are placed within mountain caves—indicated by multicolored staves—whose dark interiors are illuminated by the rich red aureoles of their saintly inhabitants.

The mid-thirteenth-century date proffered for this painting derives from the fact that Sangye Yarjon became abbot of Taklung when his teacher died in 1236, and it is unlikely that he would have been portrayed in this manner until he had assumed the spiritual mantle of his teacher. An inscription along the top of the painting's verso states that it was consecrated by Onpo Lama Rinpoche of Taklung (1251–1296), Sangye Yarjon's student and the fourth abbot of Taklung (see cat. no. 33).[2] Onpo Lama Rinpoche left Taklung in 1273, so it is unlikely that the painting was made after this date. When compared with portraits executed during Onpo Lama Rinpoche's



19: Detail



short tenure as abbot (1272–73), it is clear that this work is earlier (e.g., the line is more fluid, figural proportions less attenuated), and that the Onpo Lama Rinpoche inscription was added to an existing painting.[3] JCS

1 An inscription on the back of the painting includes consecratory mantras and the Sanskrit name of Sangye Yarjon—Prajnaguru—invoked three times.

2 *stag lung pa'i dbon po bla ma rin po che dpal gyi rab gnas bzhugs.*

3 Two examples of portraits painted during Onpo Lama Rinpoche's tenure are published in Singer and Denwood 1997, pls. 41, 42.

20. Vajravarahi Mandala

Central Tibet (Taklung monastery), ca. 1200
Distemper on cloth
70 x 56 cm (27½ x 22 in.)
Private collection

This work depicts the mandala of Vajravarahi, a goddess often invoked by monks newly initiated into Tantric meditation practices. At the center of the mandala is a dancing figure of Vajravarahi (Diamond-like Sow). The goddess is associated with triumph over ignorance (symbolized by the sow), and this, her characteristic attribute, appears just above her right ear. The almost-naked figure imparts a sense of wild abandonment: her long dark hair cascades down her back, her tiara is fixed with skulls, and a pendulous necklace of severed heads falls over her shoulders and onto her thighs. In her right hand she holds the chopper (*kartrika*), in her left, the skull cup (*kapala*); tucked in the crook of her left arm is a ceremonial staff (*khatvanga*). She tramples an inert body positioned atop an open lotus.

Early Tibetan translations of Sanskrit texts, such as the *Sadhanamala* (Garland of Means for [Spiritual] Attainment), the *Nishpannayogavali* (Garland of Perfection Yogas), and the *Hevajra Tantra*, describe Vajravarahi's mandala as unfolding within the heart of a practitioner. These texts describe some (although not all) of the divinities represented here in her assembly and the six-pointed star within which she appears. Other early Tibetan paintings also portray Vajravarahi; their assemblies differ, suggesting numerous sources for her iconography in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Tibet.[1] The *Sadhanamala* describes the six-pointed star as the union of male (the upward-pointing triangle) and female (the downward-pointing triangle) energies.[2]



20: Diagram

The bottom four figures in each of the painting's side registers are described in literary accounts as deities from the *mahasukha* (Great Bliss) realm, which encloses Vajravarahi's mandala and is said to be located at the periphery of the cosmos.[3] The diagram at the left below outlines the names of these deities and the directions of the mandala over which each presides:

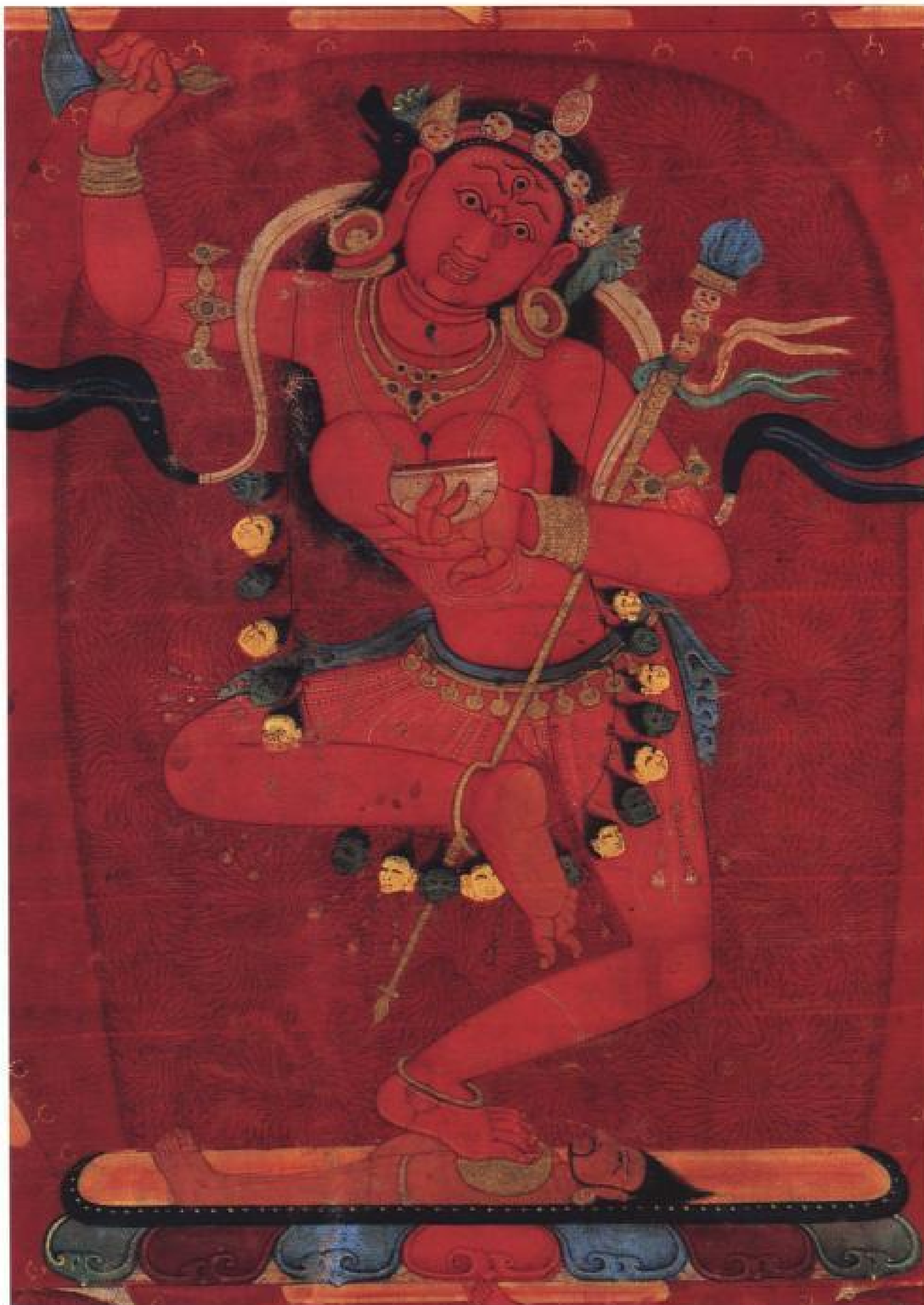
1. Kakasya, east (blue and head of a crow)
8. Ulukasya, north (green and head of a hawk)
6. Svanasya, west (red and head of a dog)
3. Sukarasya, south (yellow and head of a sow)

Deities at the intersections of the cardinal directions all possess human heads and are bicolored:
2. Yamadahi, southeast (blue and yellow)
4. Yamadhuti, southwest (yellow and red)
5. Yamadamstri, northwest (red and green)
7. Yamamathami, northeast (green and blue)

The painting's several inscriptions are rich in information and shed light on its early history. The gold inscription centered just above the lower register states that the painting is "the personal meditational image (*thugs dam*) of Onpo Lama Rinpoche," who briefly acted as fourth abbot of Taklung monastery between 1272 and 1273.[4] The reference to this painting as Onpo's *thugs dam* suggests that Onpo used the painting in Tantric visualization practices, specifically the first of three meditational stages—known as *kyerim* (*skyes rim*), the development, or generation, stage—whereby the appearance of the deity and his or her entourage is memorized until it can be reconstructed vividly within the mind of the practitioner.

An inscription on the back of the painting was composed by Onpo himself. It reads: "May the incomparable Holy Lama Prajnaguru [the Sanskrit equivalent of the initiation name given to Onpo's teacher,





20: Detail

Sangye Yarjon] and I–Kirtishri Rashmibhadra [the Sanskrit equivalent of Onpo's birth name, Drakpapel Oser Sangpo] have inseparable power to attain the oral teachings, to purify our mistaken minds, and to guide beings to [spiritual] liberation."[5] These inscriptions were probably composed by Onpo sometime between 1264 (when, at age thirteen, he met his teacher Sangye Yarjon) and 1273, the year after Sangye Yarjon's death, when Onpo left Taklung for eastern Tibet.

However, analysis of the painting's consecratory inscriptions and the top register of spiritual teachers suggests the likelihood that the painting itself was executed considerably earlier and that the other inscriptions were later additions to the work, which possibly dates to the time of Tashipel and which Onpo inherited from his teacher. The top register includes the usual Taklung masters (see cat. no. 13) through Tashipel, with one further hierarch in the right-side register—logically, his successor, Kuyelwa (1191–1236).

The consecratory inscriptions—written when the painting was made (see page 18)—make no reference to a spiritual lineage. However, two further inscriptions along the top of the painting's verso state that the painting was consecrated by successive Taklung abbots. Barely legible, these inscriptions offer crucial information about the painting's date and its early history. The inscriptions, one in gold and one in red Tibetan (*uchen*) script, appear to be in the same hand and are identical in content except for three important syllables. The gold inscription, written first (evident for reasons outlined below), may be translated: "Each of the 108 consecrations of the XXX [a numeral, possibly *bzhi'i*, "four"] masters and disciples, from Chöje Rinpoche (*chos rje rin po che*) through to Lama Rinpo [. . .] dwells [here]." The red *uchen* inscription appears directly above the gold and differs from it only by the inclusion of three syllables missing from the last name mentioned above; the relevant passage reads: "beginning with Chöje Rinpoche through to Lama Rinpo*che Onpo*."[6] The scribe must have recognized his error after misspelling Onpo Lama Rinpoche's name and correctly rewrote the inscription in red above the earlier gold inscription. Chöje Rinpoche almost certainly refers to Taklung founder Tashipel, for this epithet is used to refer to him in early Taklung histories. Moreover, another Taklung painting bears a virtually identical inscription, stating "[this painting], passed from teacher to disciple beginning with Chöje Rinpoche through to Onpo Lama Rinpoche, was immeasurably consecrated by these four."[7] In this case, there can be no doubt that Chöje Rinpoche refers to Tashipel and the "four" refers to Taklung's first four abbots. If Tashipel did confer his 108 blessings on this painting (as this interpretation of the inscription implies), it must date from before 1210, the year of his death.[8] Tibetans placed great value on objects belonging to saints, believing that such objects could assume the sanctity of their previous owner or owners. Many works of art, such as this one, were treasured as relics and passed from master to disciple. JCS

1 See Béguin 1990, pp. 172–73.
2 Mallmann 1969, p. 22.
3 Ibid., p. 31 n. 3.
4 *bla ma rin po che dbon po dpal gyi thugs dam lags//*. *Thugs dam* is the honorific term for *yi dam*, itself a translation of the Sanskrit word *ishtadevata*, "chosen deity."
5 *mtshungs med bla ma dam pa pradznya 'ghu ru dang// bdag 'ghir ti shri ra smri bha tra 'bral med ci gsung bka' bsgrub cing// rang sems 'khrul pa dag pa dang// 'gro' ba'i 'dren pa nus par shog//*. This inscription is written in gold *uchen* script.
6 *chos rje rin po che nas bla ma rin po che dbon po dpal yan chod yab sras [XXX] rab gnas brgya rtsa brgyad re bzhugs/*.
7 *chos rje rin po che nas bla ma rin po che dbon po dpal yan chod yab sras bzhi'i rab gnas dpag du med pa bzhugs/*. This inscription appears on a painting recently identified as the Mahashri Heruka Mandala, now in the Michael J. and Beata McCormick collection, published in New York 1997, pp. 78–79.
8 If this interpretation is correct, then we have evidence of a living master—in this instance, Tashipel—depicted in a painting's top register. To date, it seemed that a painting's top register was reserved for deceased members of the commissioning community's spiritual lineage, but this may not have always been the case.

21. Vajravarahi

Central Tibet, ca. 1200–1250
Distemper on cloth
83 x 60 cm (32 ⅝ x 23 ⅝ in.)
Private collection

Vajravarahi bears her characteristic symbol, the sow's head, which emerges from behind her right ear and heralds her triumph over ignorance. In appearance she is much like the figure in the earlier painting (cat. no. 20); her almost-naked red body is adorned with white bone jewelry and a long garland composed of severed heads. She holds the ritual knife (*kartrika*) and a skull cup (*kapala*); a ritual staff (*khatvanga*) rests against her left shoulder. Unlike the earlier example, in which Vajravarahi appears within a six-pointed star enclosed by a circle, here the goddess is presented against an arch of red flames. Six goddesses, known as the Kavacha yoginis, flank her: Kavacha Vajravarahi, Yamini, Mohini, Santrasini, Sanchalini, and Chandika.[1]

Eight cremation grounds (*shmashanas*) surround the goddess and her entourage. Separated by a narrow meandering stream, each is associated with one of the cardinal or intermediate points of the compass. Their names vary from text to text, but a standard group includes: Chandogra (Terrible and Frightening), Gahvara (Impenetrable Abyss), Jvalakulakaranka (Blazing Skull), Vibhishana (Terrifying), Lakshmyavana (Lakshmi's Garden), Ghorandhakara (Frightening Darkness), Kilakilarava (Shrieks of Joy), and Attattahasa (Boisterous Laughter).[2] In myth, these eight are associated with Indian sites where ascetics convened for lengthy periods of meditation. Some texts offer psychological interpretations of the cremation grounds, suggesting that they represent the eight aggregates of human consciousness (*ashta vijnana kaya*), which tie man to the phenomenal world and to the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*).[3] Each cremation ground has its own *stupa* (the dome-shaped symbol of the Buddha's teaching and, thus, the promise of salvation even in the midst of *samsara*), mountain, river, tree, and mendicant. The cremation grounds also symbolize death and the fear of death: after confronting and overcoming this fear, one is free to move into subtler regions of the human psyche.

Two registers at the top of the painting and one at the bottom include historical figures whose Tibetan names are written in small gold script. Although the script is worn, a few names can be deciphered, and two are particularly noteworthy. The first figure in the second row, Chal Kunga Dorje (*dpyal kun dga rdo rje*, fl. ca. first half of the twelfth century), brought teachings of Hevajra and Vajravarahi to Nying Phukpa (*nying phug pa*, b. 1094) and Gyaltsha (*rgyal tsha*, 1118–1195); the latter was a leading disciple of the Kagyu master Phakmo Drupa.[4] The third figure from the left in the second row is Ngari Kyiton (*mnga ris kyi ston*), another teacher of Gyaltsha.[5] The only name in the bottom register still legible is that of the historical figure on the far right—the *acarya* (spiritual teacher; *slob dpon*) Sherabum (*shes rab 'bum*), whose dates and life history are as yet unknown. JCS

1 See Chandra and Raghu Vira 1991, illus. 572–77.
2 After Mallmann 1975, pp. 349–51. See also Seattle 1990, p. 266.
3 For a brief description of the eight *vijnana*, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, pp. 156–57.
4 Roerich 1979, pp. 396, 705, 1009.
5 Ibid., p. 1009.



22. Achala

Central Tibet, ca. 1200
Distemper on cloth
75 x 57.5 cm (29½ x 22⅝ in.)
Private collection

Achala, the Immovable, assumes his characteristic kneeling pose (*achalasana*) atop a lotus platform and against a fiery halo of gold-tipped flames. His right hand wields a sword as his left makes the gesture of menace (*tarjani mudra*) while holding a lasso. He bites his lower lip, exposing sharp fangs, which—together with his bloodshot eyes—suggest his wrathful nature. Achala is one of a group of wrathful deities (*krodha vighnantaka*) who enable practitioners to overcome obstacles; he may be invoked to eliminate both "inner" (e.g., negative mental tendencies) and "outer" (e.g., enemies) hindrances. Achala's chief role, however, is to awaken the initiate to his or her own negative aspects and "to transform these into compassion and wisdom."[1] He is sometimes described as a wrathful form of the Celestial Buddha Akshobhya, a symbol of the Buddha's unshakable resolve to attain enlightenment. Achala is also called Chandamaharoshana, an appellation by which he is known in the *Chandamaharoshana Tantra*, a text that Tibetans classified among the *Anuttarayoga* (Supreme Yoga) Tantras. Known both as Achala and Chandamaharoshana, he is the enlightened exponent of truth in the *Chandamaharoshana Tantra*, answering questions posed by his consort as they are joined in sexual embrace.[2] The text itself explains the etymology of his name: "Canda means one who is very violent (*tivratara*) and . . . very wrathful (*maharosana*).[3]

Achala often appears as a subsidiary figure in Tibetan paintings; only rarely in surviving works is he represented as the central figure.[4] Although the various other religious orders might also have worshiped Achala, the styles of headgear worn by the teachers in the top register indicate that this painting may have been associated with the Sakya order. Gold and red high-peaked caps and a rounded red cap with long earflaps appear in other paintings firmly associated with the Sakya order, for instance, a Chakrasamvara Mandala dated to about 1500 in the Michael J. and Beata McCormick Collection.[5]

Achala's entourage of deities is linked by two meandering vines that encircle the figures in a pleasing, rhythmic pattern as blossoms burst from the many tendrils. The vines emerge from the open lotus at the center of the painting's bottom register. In front of the lotus is a *vajra*—symbol of the adamantine nature of Buddhist teachings. The compositional device of the scrolling vine appears in other works in the exhibition: the Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17) of about the early thirteenth century and the fifteenth-century Kunga Nyingpo portrait (cat. no. 51). JCS

1 See Linrothe 1999.
2 Ibid., pp. 230–32.
3 George 1974, p. 44 n. 1, as cited in Linrothe 1999, p. 228.
4 See the thirteenth-century painting featuring four deities, including Achala, in the Musée Guimet; Béguin 1990, pp. 22–23.
5 Published in New York 1997, pp. 92–93.



23. Three Tathagatas

a. Ratnasambhava
Central Tibet, ca. 1200–1250
Distemper on cloth
68.6 x 54.9 cm (27 x 21⅝ in.)

Pritzker Collection

b. Amitabha
Central Tibet, ca. 1200–1250
Distemper on cloth
69.2 x 54.9 cm (27¼ x 21⅝ in.)

Private collection

c. Amoghasiddhi
Central Tibet, ca. 1200–1250
Distemper on cloth
68.8 x 54 cm (27⅛ x 21¼ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Philanthropic Fund Gift, 1991 (1991.74)

The five Tathagatas, Celestial Buddhas, comprise one of the most important groups of Esoteric Buddhist deities described in the Yoga Tantras. Each deity is associated with a color, direction, gesture, and vehicle: Vairochana (white, zenith, *dharmachakra mudra*, lion), Akshobhya (blue, east, *bhumisparsha mudra*, elephant), Amitabha (red, west, *dhyana mudra*, peacock), Ratnasambhava (yellow, south, *vajra mudra*, horse), and Amoghasiddhi (green, north, *abhaya mudra*, Garuda). Each governs a family (*kula*) of deities that includes bodhisattvas, a human Buddha, and a goddess.[1] Vairochana usually presides over the group of five.[2]

Judging by the large number of images that survive from the late twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth century, the cult of the Tathagatas must have been particularly popular during that period. All five are depicted with the same format, which is based on an earlier model (see cat. no. 4). Each is placed on a lotus seat, flanked by two standing bodhisattvas and a group of seated bodhisattvas. These comprise a chorus of listeners (*shravakas*). Typically, the vehicles of the Tathagatas appear at the sides of or beneath their lotus seats. At the bottom of the *thanka* is a register of auxiliary deities. No precise explanation for the assemblage of standing and seated bodhisattvas flanking the Tathagatas has been given. It has been posited that the artists were portraying the Tathagatas as they preached to devotees in their heaven. One would assume that originally each Tathagata had specific attendants. However, in this set, the same two bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya, flank three different Tathagatas. A similar uniformity exists among the seated bodhisattvas in all three *thankas*: they make the same hand gestures and their colors are the same.[3] The composition could also simply be a melding of two standard types of Indian images: the Buddha flanked by standing attendants, which has its roots in some of the earliest images, and the Buddha flanked by a chorus of listeners, which harks back to depictions of the historical Buddha preaching in the Tushita (joyful) Heaven before his descent to earth. The hieratic structure of these compositions with deities of three distinct sizes—four, if the lower register is considered—is different from what can be observed in Indian and Nepalese book illustrations. There, the standing attendants and lower register are absent.

The Tathagatas' elaborate garb, which proclaims their elevated status, is worth examining closely. Their jewelry includes a crown and armlets with triangular jewel-encrusted elements, a series of four necklaces, the lowest two of which support lotus-bud dangles, and a horizontal pendant amulet. Large earplugs, bangles, and anklets complete the ensemble. The crowns are attached above the ears by means of ribbons whose ends stream upward. Strands of hair fall to either side of the head, tied above the shoulders with jeweled bands and ribbons; curly tendrils tumble down the upper arms. The short, horizontally striped dhotis are attached by elaborate waistbands, tied so that their bifurcated pleated ends stand up along the top edges of the thighs. Central pleated sashes fall between and under the Tathagatas' legs and fan out along the tops of the lotus seats. In some instances, a transparent scarf is worn across the shoulders.

These three *thankas* are all that survive of the original set of five. The painting is particularly fine, and the extraordinary calm, restraint, and monumentality typical of the best examples of the period are



23a



23b



23c

clearly seen. The drawing is elegant, well rendered, and the color is harmonious. Although the compositions follow the early model, there are subtle differences in the details. No throne back is indicated, and even the gilded triangular flanges abutting the upper sides of the pillow are absent. The foliate scrolling associated with the *makara* or *hamsa* has been reduced to an abstract motif that follows the contour of the pillow (rather than twining behind) and terminates after only two scrolls. As noted above, the standing and seated bodhisattvas in all of the paintings are identical, and the only differences, aside from the main deity, are in the lower registers.[4]

In each of the *thankas*, the Tathagatas (Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi) are shown in canonical fashion, with their appropriate color, *mudra*, and vehicle. The deities in the lower register are identified by inscriptions (most of which can be read), but the system that governed their choice is not apparent. Other *thankas* of the same Tathagatas have different deities in the bottom register (see cat. no. 36). In the *thanka* of Ratnasambhava they include a group of auspicious and wealth-giving deities; from left to right: Vaishravana, the *yaksha* Dhanada, probably Jambhala, Ganapati, a fierce blue deity holding a skull cup and mongoose, and a standing female goddess, probably Vasudhara (who is associated with Jambhala). In the painting of Amitabha, they are Manjushri, Manidharin, Shadakshari Lokeshvara, Mahavidya, Padmapani, and Tara.



23a: Detail



23a: Detail

In the Amoghasiddhi, five forms of the goddess Tara and a consecrating monk in front of an offering stand are pictured. As was typical, the Amoghasiddhi was the painting in the set that was reserved to include the consecrating monk. There must have been a standard order, following the directions for these deities, and Amoghasiddhi was probably either the first or the last in the list. SMK

1 See cat. no. 9 and Mallmann 1986, pp. 36–37.
2 See Matsunaga 1978, pp. xv and xxii, for a discussion of the evolution of the Vajradhatu mandala in which, earlier, Shakyamuni had reigned in the central position.
3 It is tempting to see this group of eight bodhisattvas as those of the Eight Bodhisattva mandala (see cat. no. 28), but the presence of the standing Maitreya and Avalokiteshvara in the paintings, who are members of this ensemble, seems to negate the possibility. (See also cat. no. 4, note 1.)
4 A version of the scroll without a source already exists in the Ford Tara, but there, it clambers up to the top of the nimbus. Compare the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, book cover, fig. 15.

24. Maitreya Buddha

Central Tibet, second half of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
79.4 x 62.9 cm (31¼ x 24¾ in.)

Private collection



Maitreya is most usually depicted as the Buddha of the Future, waiting in the Tushita Heaven for the time to come when he will be reincarnated as a Brahman. In this *thanka*, his iconography is more complex. He is depicted unadorned and wearing the long dhoti and sheer patterned trousers associated with bodhisattvas. He is flanked by two standing bodhisattvas—a white Padmapani and a yellow Manjushri—and surrounded by thirty-five smaller Buddhas, all but one assuming *bhumisparsha mudra*, the earth-touching gesture that is the standard pose of the Green Tathagata Amoghasiddhi as well as of the historical Buddha. In one system that links the five Buddhas of the Past with the five Tathagatas, Maitreya is associated with Amoghasiddhi. This may explain the repeated figures surrounding the main image, albeit with yellow and red skin colors (not green). Above Maitreya's head a single figure of Vairochana can be identified by the gesture he is making, *dharmachakra mudra*, but not by his traditional white skin color, which is yellow here. His position can be attributed to the fact that he is the head of Maitreya's line. The thirty-five Buddhas can be divided into seven sets of five; perhaps each corresponds to the seven Buddhas of the Past.[1]

Maitreya is seated on a lotus that rests on a throne base inhabited by the ubiquitous beasts. He



24: Detail

holds his hands before his chest in *dharmachakra mudra*, the gesture of religious discourse. Threaded through his hands is a stalk that divides into two stems, each terminating in blossoms that flank his shoulders. At his left is the *nagapushpika*, or *campaka*, the flower from which Maitreya's *bodhi* tree will emerge. The flower at his right has at its center a vase, in itself a symbol of the deity. Behind Maitreya is a large pillow set against a throne back with two tiers; the upper tier is largely obscured by the two flowers next to his shoulders and is just barely visible under the *makara* perched on the left. Maitreya's hair is arranged in a tall chignon, indicative of his future as a Brahman. His garments resemble those worn by the standing bodhisattvas who flank him. The scarf that encircles his chest is more usually worn by Tathagatas. He lacks most of the elaborate jewelry seen on images of Esoteric Buddhist deities, including armbands, anklets, crowns, and earrings.

The painting is beautifully rendered, and it radiates a strong presence. The use of shading in the main figure to give it more dimension is noteworthy. Several elements in the work indicate a date in the last half of the thirteenth century. A number of the standard motifs associated with the throne ensemble have been misunderstood. The composition, with its standing figures of bodhisattvas and chorus of listeners, is akin to earlier *thankas* of Tathagatas, where the deity did not sit against a clearly visible throne back but only against a pillow (cat. no. 23). Here, the artist has had problems in rationalizing the spatial relationship between the throne back and the figures. In the original conception, going back to the earliest extant images of the Buddha in India, the bodhisattvas flanked the main figure. Here, the lotus seat and the rampant *vyalas* project in front of the attendants, which places them behind the entire central ensemble but in front of the surrounding rainbow, which emanates from their lotus platforms. Another curious feature is the way in which the *makaras* are pushed away from Maitreya's aureole so that their foliate tails, instead of abutting it, droop down along the top of the throne back before commencing their upward spiral (see also cat. nos. 28, 29). It is also unusual that the right-hand terminus of the throne bar is lower than the one on the left. This was probably done in order to accommodate the flower just above it, but its structural integrity is compromised. Also, the *vyalas* do not support the lower crossbar, which floats above their heads. Finally, the proliferation of deities of various sizes in the borders is another indication of this *thanka*'s date. SMK

1 Mallmann 1986, pp. 244–45. This explanation of the side registers is by no means definitive.

25. Amoghasiddhi

Tibet, second half of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
94.9 x 71.6 cm (37⅜ x 28⅛ in.)
Private collection

Amoghasiddhi is shown seated in typical fashion, flanked by Manjushri (right) and Avalokiteshvara (left) and surrounded by a chorus of ten bodhisattvas. His throne is supported by two *kinnaras*, his vehicles, while two others, playing horns, inhabit the side niches. The half-avian–half-human creatures are paired on either side of a central throne cloth that is emblazoned with double *vajras* and which falls, uncharacteristically, against a decorated background rather than a void. The outer edges of the throne base are supported by two serpent deities (*nagarajas*), who can be recognized only by their *naga* hoods; no other reptilian features appear. Amoghasiddhi sits against a Bengali-style throne whose double tier is supported by rampant *vyalas* astride elephants. Two *makaras* are poised on the upper rail of the throne back, and their tails swoop down before spiraling up along the sides of the aureole.

It is not usual for Tathagatas to be enthroned in this manner. In the earliest example in the Bengali style (cat. no. 4), the only suggestion of a throne back is seen in the two triangular flanges that abut the top of the bolster, and there is no foliate scrolling around the aureole. In early-thirteenth-century examples, no throne back is visible but a small decorative scroll is nestled into the space between the pillow and the



aureole (cat. no. 23). The inclusion of the complete throne, which had previously been reserved mainly for hierarchs, would appear to be a late-thirteenth-century development. This has led to an interesting spatial incongruity; the *vyalas* overlap the elbows of the standing bodhisattvas, placing the attendants behind rather than at the side of Amoghasiddhi. This same phenomenon is seen in a number of contemporaneous *thankas* and seems to be a misunderstanding of the original spatial conception (see cat. no. 24). The lower register has a series of five figures: the consecrator, a Tara, Vaishravana, Dhanda (possibly), and Kubera. The painting of Amoghasiddhi seems to have been the one of the set of five reserved for the portrayal of the consecrator. Usually, a separate cell was reserved for the offerings, but here they are compressed in a panel to the right of the monk and radically reduced in size. SMK

26. Portrait of Two Monks

Central Tibet (Taklung monastery), ca. 1300
Distemper on cloth
51 x 39.5 cm (20⅛ x 15⅝ in.)
The Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund (1987.146)

This fine double portrait of two monks engaged in religious debate probably once belonged to a set of paintings that illustrated the transmission of Tibetan Buddhist religious teachings within the Taklung branch of the Kagyu order. Although not identified by inscriptions, the two central figures are almost certainly Phakmo Drupa (1110–1170), on the left, and his disciple Tashipel (1142–1210), founder of Taklung monastery and also known as Taklung Thangpa Chenpo (see cat. no. 18); the diminutive figure between and slightly above them would be Phakmo Drupa's teacher, Gampopa. These conclusions are based not only on the fact that the style and composition of this painting closely resemble those of earlier Taklung portraits but also on the physiognomic similarities of the two main figures to those of other portrayals with firmly established identities.[1] Tashipel is usually portrayed with a goatee and mustache, and Phakmo Drupa with a beard and broader face, as in the earlier portrait (cat. no. 18). Go Lotsawa notes that Phakmo Drupa was a heavy man; during a journey by mule, "because of the weight of his body, the legs of the mule became rigid like pillars," and the animal could go no further.[2]

The central figures share a lotus platform, and their thrones are similar to those seen in the earlier Taklung portraits mentioned above. A date of about 1300 can be posited based on the attenuated proportions of the *vyalas*, the more exaggerated thrust of the *makaras'* trunks, and other features, such as the mountain staves, which suggest a later phase of this style. In earlier paintings, such as the Tashipel portrait (cat. no. 18), the staves are generally larger and more variable, whereas in this work, the staves are more standardized and their treatment is somewhat perfunctory. These observations are further supported by reference to two other Taklung portraits, one depicting Onpo Lama Rinpoche, which can be dated, on inscriptional evidence, to about 1272–73, and another, depicting Marpa, dating to about the second half of the fourteenth century.[3] This Cleveland painting certainly predates the portrait of Marpa, where lotus petals and garment folds are more elaborately patterned and the mountain staves are even more standardized. When compared with the Onpo Lama Rinpoche portrait, the Cleveland work appears to be slightly later, as its forms and figural proportions are characteristic of the later phase of this style.

Although verisimilitude was not a requirement in Tibetan portraiture, there is evidence to suggest that efforts were made to preserve elements of hierarchs' features and other physical characteristics, even in portraits created long after the death of the subject. Phakmo Drupa (on the left) possesses a broad face, a bulbous nose, and a distinctive pattern of facial hair—a relatively full beard and a mustache—much as he does in other portraits where his identification is unequivocal, whether by inscription or by his appearance in a lineage of Taklung progenitors, where his identity is clear by context. Tashipel is portrayed with mustache, goatee, and full head of hair, much as he appears in the earlier portrait in this volume. But the regularity of their features and the near-perfect pattern of their beards and mustaches suggest that their





26: Detail

portrayal, even if informed by knowledge of the subjects' actual appearance, is nevertheless idealized.

In the top register, from the left, are Shakyamuni Buddha, five Esoteric Buddhist forms of the bodhisattva Manjushri, and a four-armed goddess whose attributes are now partly abraded. Just above the mountain staves that mark the cavern of the central figures are a bodhisattva (far left) and a mahasiddha (far right). In the bottom register are a monk seated before ritual implements, two other unidentified monks, and the deities Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, and Vajravarahi. JCS

1 In particular, an unpublished thirteenth-century portrait painting in which an inscription identifies the subject as Phakmo Drupa. And Tashipel appears in the present painting from Cleveland much as he does in cat. no. 18, where he is identified by an inscription on the verso.
2 Roerich 1979, p. 560.
3 Singer and Denwood 1997, pls. 41, 48.

27. Scenes from the Life of the Historical Buddha

Central Tibet, ca. late 13th–early 14th century
Distemper on cloth
69 x 60.5 cm (27⅛ x 23⅞ in.)
Private collection

This painting depicts scenes from the life of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. Although no single authenticated account of the Buddha's life survives, several Sanskrit texts are acknowledged as generally authoritative, among them the *Lalitavistara*, the *Buddhacharita*, and the *Mahavastu*. These literary accounts inspired works of art in which Shakyamuni's life was codified into four, eight, or twelve great events, although some narratives, as shown in this painting, include additional scenes as well. Gautama Shakyamuni spent most of his life in eastern India, and some of the "great events" are associated with particular sites where they are said to have occurred; for instance, the enlightenment is linked with Bodh Gaya. As eastern India swelled with pilgrims between the ninth and twelfth centuries, imagery associated with the Buddha's spiritual biography became increasingly popular, inspiring works of art not only in this region but also throughout Buddhist Asia.

The central scene (1, see diagram, p. 116) shows the robe-clad Shakyamuni seated within the Mahabodhi Temple; branches and leaves of the *bodhi* tree appear from behind the spire. His right hand is poised in the earth-touching gesture (*bhumisparsha mudra*), which is associated with his victory over Mara (*maravijaya*) in an episode just prior to his enlightenment. Having vowed to remain in meditation until he penetrated the mysteries of existence, he was visited by Mara, a demon associated with all the veils and distractions of mundane existence. Mara's menacing soldiers flank the temple's spire, hurling weapons and making threatening gestures (1a). The Buddha remained unmoved by these assaults and by all the subsequent distractions, both pleasant and unpleasant, with which Mara sought to deflect him from his goal. According to some accounts, Mara's final assault consisted of an attempt to undermine the bodhisattva's sense of worthiness: by what entitlement did he seek the lofty goal of spiritual enlightenment and freedom

from rebirth? Aided by spirits who reminded him of the countless compassionate efforts he had made on behalf of sentient beings throughout his many animal and human incarnations, Shakyamuni recognized that it was his destiny to be poised on the threshold of enlightenment. In response to Mara's query, Shakyamuni moved his right hand from his lap to touch the ground, stating, "the earth is my witness." This act of unwavering resolve caused Mara and his army of demons and temptresses to disperse, and Shakyamuni then experienced his great enlightenment.

The episodes in the painting's right border include Shakyamuni's conception during a dream in which his mother, Queen Maya, is impregnated by a white elephant who enters her right side (2); his birth, in which he emerges from his mother's right side, greeted by the gods Brahma and Indra (3); the visit of the sage Asita, who announces to King Shuddhodana that his son and heir has been born "for the sake of supreme knowledge. . . . Having forsaken his kingdom, indifferent to all worldly objects, and having attained the highest truth by strenuous efforts, he will shine forth as a sun of knowledge to destroy the darkness of illusion in the world."[1] In this scene (4), the aged Asita is shown twice, once as he makes his prediction seated before King Shuddhodana and the infant Shakyamuni and, a second time, while collapsing in grief as he realizes that because of his advanced age he will not witness the great spiritual flowering of the infant sage.

King Shuddhodana recoiled at the thought of losing his heir to religion and made every effort to shield him. The scenes in the painting's bottom registers describe the young prince's life within the palace, his existential awakening, and his subsequent departure from the palace at the onset of his spiritual search. He mastered the arts of writing and recitation (5), and swimming and archery (6). He captured the heart of his wife, the beautiful Yashodhara, in an archery contest, probably the one depicted in the scene in which the young prince is observed by young women as he steadies his bow (7). His existential awakening is sparked by four excursions outside the palace: He encounters old age (a man leaning on a staff [8]); sickness (a man lying on the ground, wrapped in a blanket [9]); death (a body tied with a black band [10]); and a religious mendicant, the seated monk seen here (11). Troubled by the



27: Diagram



inevitable and apparently senseless fate of all men and women, Shakyamuni vowed to free himself from the cycle of birth, sickness, old age, and death by apprenticing himself to ascetic practitioners. He left the palace under cover of darkness, accompanied by his faithful charioteer Chandaka and his horse Kanthaka (12); removing his crown (here, secured on Kanthaka's back) and other ornaments, he sent them back to his father's palace.

The left register records events associated with Shakyamuni's austerities, his enlightenment, and his first teachings, as well as the miracles associated with his ministry. The cutting of his hair (14) signals the beginning of his period of asceticism. He refused to yield to the craving of his senses—and even to his need for bodily sustenance, which brought him to the point of starvation. Young boys who came upon him in meditation prodded his ears with sticks, thinking he was dead (15).[2] Shakyamuni ended his austerities when he recognized that sensual deprivation was as much a hindrance to spiritual awakening as was the sensual indulgence he had enjoyed as a prince. From a village girl, Sujata, he accepted a bowl of rice cooked in milk (16). Shortly afterward, Shakyamuni made a seat for himself under a pipal tree at Bodh Gaya and vowed to remain seated in meditation until he experienced profound liberation (1). After his enlightenment, he remained in meditation for seven full days; he was protected from violent storms by the serpent king Muchalinda, who wrapped himself around the Buddha to form a canopy surrounding the Buddha's head (17).[3] Having emerged from his meditation, the Buddha was persuaded by the gods Indra and Brahma that others would benefit from learning of his experience. Careful to indicate that he was not to be regarded as a savior but merely as a guide, he gave his first sermon in the deer park at Sarnath, where five ascetics, who had once been his companions, became his first disciples (18).

During Shakyamuni's long ministry, his disciples reported many miracles, a few of which were incorporated into an established iconography. The first of these is the Miracle of Shravasti, also known as the Miracle of the Twins (19). This episode involved several miraculous events, including the Buddha's creation of a double who acted as interlocutor, posing questions that the Teacher answered before a vast assembly.[4] Soon after the miracle at Shravasti, the Buddha ascended to Trayatrimsha Heaven to preach to his mother and the gods, descending months later by a bejeweled ladder (20). Other miracles include the gift of honey from a monkey (21) and Shakyamuni's taming of the mad elephant Nalagiri, sent by his jealous cousin, Devadatta (22). Remarkably, the last great event in the Buddha's life—his death (*mahaparinirvana*)—is the only major event of his spiritual biography omitted in this work.

It is interesting to compare this painting with a twelfth-century Tibetan painting of the same theme in the Zimmerman Family Collection.[5] Many of the episodes are similarly rendered, although the present work includes additional scenes not represented in the Zimmerman painting. Moreover, in the Zimmerman painting, the Buddha's life is rendered in an Indian guise—the costumes, architecture, and other aspects of the imagery closely follow Indian models. In this work, however, the palaces are based on Tibetan architecture, and the royal robes resemble those worn by the early Tibetan kings. The painting may be compared with the thirteenth-century painting of Amitayus in this exhibition (cat. no. 29), with which it shares many iconographic features, including temple spire, throne setting, and standing attendant bodhisattvas. The somewhat more perfunctory treatment here suggests a later phase of this style, probably toward the end of the thirteenth or during the early fourteenth century. JCS

1 From the *Buddha-Karita* of Ashvaghosha; see Cowell 1969, pp. 10–14.

2 Although in this rendition Shakyamuni's body appears unchanged, during this period of his life the Buddha is sometimes portrayed as an emaciated, skeletal figure, most notably in Gandharan art.

3 Literary accounts of this episode vary; some state that Muchalinda protected the Buddha during his third seven-day meditation after enlightenment. See Cummings 1982, p. 175.

4 One might expect to see two Buddhas in this scene, but the iconography here appears much as it does in other works, as Susan Huntington has observed, in Seattle 1990, pp. 104, 188, 316.

5 Published in New York 1975, no. 3; Seattle 1990, no. 107; and New York, *Himalayas*, 1991, no. 81.

28. Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life

Central Tibet, late 13th–early 14th century
Distemper on cloth
79.5 x 60 cm (31¼ x 23⅝ in.)

Private collection





28: Detail

This beautiful painting exemplifies the pervasive influence of eastern Indian compositions and styles as late as the end of the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, even as it reflects many of the changes that had begun to permeate that conservative tradition. It was not made as part of a set of Tathagatas but rather as an independent commission. This explains its departure from the basic composition used for the depiction of that type of Buddha. Here, the Tathagata Amitabha in his form as Amitayus, the Buddha of Eternal Life, is seated on a double lotus set on a raised throne; he is crowned and wears the ornaments of the bodhisattva.[1] His red skin color, the hands held in a gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*), and peacock vehicles placed beneath the throne are all shared by Amitabha. Here, Amitayus wears elaborate jewelry, long transparent trousers like those seen on standing bodhisattvas (see cat. nos. 23, 24), and a shawl that wraps around his chest and then drapes into a swag over his left arm. He sits against a double-tier throne back that is supported by the typical *vyalas* astride elephants. Atop the throne back, replacing the ubiquitous *makaras* or *hamsas*, are two miniature *kinnaras* whose long foliate tails droop to the top of the throne back before curving upward to encircle the deity's aureole. The *kinnaras* are set within an atypical trilobe red aureole whose sides bulge out to accommodate them. In images of Tathagatas, this elaborate throne back is usually only suggested (cat. no. 23). Above Amitayus's head a crouching Garuda devours two snakes as he sits against a burgeoning fruit tree.

The basic composition and iconography are also unusual. Amitayus is flanked not by standing bodhisattvas but rather by eight seated ones, some of whom, again uncharacteristically, hold attributes. These are probably the Eight Bodhisattvas who are associated with the fulfillment of earthly boons and often form a mandala around a central deity.[2] The bodhisattvas and their attributes are, clockwise from the upper right, Akashagarbha (flaming jewels on lotus), an unidentified bodhisattva (net-crown), Sarvanivaranavishkambhi? (discus), an unidentified bodhisattva (*vajra*), Kshitigarbha (red lotus), Samantabhadra (sword), Maitreya (bottle), and Vajrapani as Ratnapani (moon on lotus).[3] At the top, to the left and the right, are small registers that mirror each other; four Tathagatas appear in each, and they can be identified by their hand gestures. From left to right they are: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi. Seated just below the center of Amitayus's throne is the goddess Kalo; at either side of the peacock vehicles is a protector: to the left, a ferocious red deity, to the right, Achala (blue). The lower register contains, from right to left, Hayagriva, a medicine Buddha, a female four-armed deity, Manidharin, Shadakshari Lokeshvara, Mahavidya (probably),[4] offerings, and a portrait of the white-robed, long-haired couple who are probably the donors, each holding a bell in the left hand and a *vishvavajra* in the right. These attributes identify the donors as lay practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism. They seem to be participating in a ceremony—probably the consecration of the painting. The uncharacteristic appearance of the Eight

Bodhisattvas with Amitayus, who is often invoked to grant longevity, might indicate that the painting was commissioned in the hope of gaining a long life. This would also explain its unusually lavish execution.

Initially, the dating of the work was problematic, and a range of earlier dates was considered. However, after close scrutiny, many elements in the painting suggest a date close to the beginning of the fourteenth century rather than earlier. The style of Amitayus's lavish jewelry is derived from that of the adornments worn by Tathagatas portrayed in the first half of the thirteenth century, and, therefore, cannot antedate them. For example, the Buddha's head is surmounted by an undecorated flaring element that in turn is crowned by a triangular jeweled flange. In the Kronos Amoghasiddhi, this ensemble is a bun (probably the *ushnisha*, a cranial protuberance that is a sign of wisdom and buddhahood) with a jewel at its apex. In the Metropolitan Museum's Amoghasiddhi (see cat. no. 23c), it has become vase-shaped but still has a jewel at the top. Here, all resemblance to its original ovoid shape has been lost, and the single jewel has been replaced by one of the crown's ornaments. The drooping tails of the *kinnaras* are like those seen on the late-thirteenth-century Maitreya and Amoghasiddhi (cat. nos. 24, 25), although in those paintings the foliate tails still scroll properly behind the aureole rather than against its sides. Lastly, the bifurcated ends of the scarf of the horrific figure at the extreme bottom left of the *thanka* billow upward rather than sideways, as they appear in works of the first half of the thirteenth century, or earlier. SMK

1 Hazra 1986, p. 70.
2 See Granoff 1968–69, pp. 88–90, 92–94.
3 The other two bodhisattvas should be Manjushri (sword and blue lotus) and Padmapani (lotus and Buddha in crown), and it is curious that their attributes are not given to the two unidentified bodhisattvas. Moreover, Manjushri and Padmapani are frequently portrayed, while the other six, as here, are more rarely shown.
4 See cat. no. 23 for a tentative identification of the three central deities, each of whose names, only partly legible, are inscribed there; see, too, cat. no. 10, where they also appear.

29. Amitayus

Central Tibet, 13th century
Distemper on cloth
79.5 x 60.5 cm (31¼ x 23⅞ in.)
Private collection

This beautiful painting represents the Buddha Amitayus (Of Infinite Life), a deity associated with rites that would ensure a long life. Amitayus is closely connected with Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, and in some texts the two names are used interchangeably for the same deity. Here, Amitayus is seated in a meditative posture, his hands cradling a vase (*kalasha*) containing the elixir of immortality (*amrita*) and leaves of the *ashoka* tree, which symbolize "a long life without (*a*) the misery (*shoka*) of disease."[1] The *kalasha* is surmounted by an alms bowl; Tucci notes that Amitayus is sometimes described as holding a "vase for alms," and perhaps that is what is intended in this painting.[2] Works such as the *Sukhavativyuha* and the *Saddharma Pundarika* describe Amitayus/Amitabha preaching the *dharma* in an exquisitely rarefied realm known as Sukhavati Paradise.[3] There are no specific references to this paradise in the painting, but Tucci notes that "besides being a heaven, [Sukhavati] remains one of the numberless worlds in infinite space, where a Buddha analogous to the historical Buddha preaches the Law; he [Amitayus] . . . is accordingly represented under the bodhi tree."[4] Here, the leaves and branches of the *bodhi* tree can be seen behind the spire of Amitayus's temple.

The enthroned deity is flanked by two standing attendants, the bodhisattvas Padmapani (on his right) and Mahasthamaprapta (a form of Vajrapani, on his left). Amitayus appears within the trilobe arch of a temple whose superstructure (*shikhara*) rises above the attendant bodhisattvas in receding tiers, and is then surmounted by a shrine enclosing a Buddha in *bhumisparsha mudra*, the earth-touching gesture, a reference to the historical Buddha's enlightenment. Streamers arranged in an even scrolling pattern fall from a parasol at the top of the *shikhara*, and cloud-borne attendants bear a parasol and a banner, symbols heralding the attainment of enlightenment. The painting is unusual in the iconography of its side registers, each of which portrays three enthroned Buddhas within temples. Of the six, five hold the vase of immortal elixir, Amitayus's identifying attribute, and

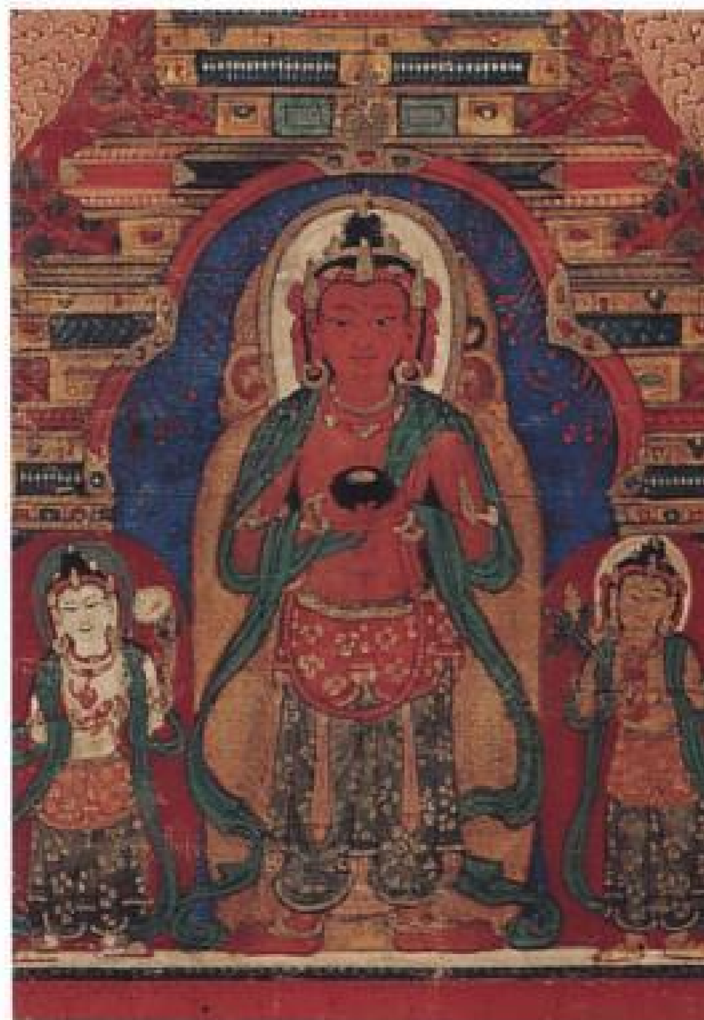


bear the colors associated with the five Tathagatas: green (Amoghasiddhi), white (Vairochana), yellow (Ratnasambhava), blue (Akshobhya), and red (Amitabha). The sixth Buddha stands at the lower left holding an alms bowl. Four seated figures of Amitayus flank the spire of the temple, as do images of Avalokiteshvara (below them, on the left) and Ushnishavijaya, on the right.

In the top register are eight Buddhas, perhaps the seven Buddhas of the Past and Maitreya, the Future Buddha.[5] In the bottom register (far left and far right) are the Four Guardian Kings (*caturmaharajas*), each associated with one of the four cardinal points of the compass: Dhrtarashtra holding a stringed instrument (east), Virudhaka holding a sword (south), Virupaksha with a serpent and a *stupa* (west), and Vaishravana with a staff and mongoose (north). The deities Achala (with sword and noose), a wrathful Vajrapani (with bell and *vajra*), and Tara also appear in the bottom register, along with the consecrating monk, a mustached figure drawn with great sensitivity and seated in front of a white, gold-patterned cloth. He holds the stem of an incense burner, fashioned in the shape of a lotus bud, from which smoke is rising. At the monk's right a low table supports a *stupa* whose plinth bears crossed fly whisks flanked by offering lamps and other implements associated with ritual practice.

Little is known about the worship of Amitayus in Tibet, although it is likely that all Buddhists would have venerated this deity to promote health and prolong life. A late-twelfth-century painting in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is a portrayal of Amitayus accompanied by an inscription which states that the painting was dedicated during a long life-attainment ceremony performed by Chokyi Gyaltsen (d. 1189?).[6] Tucci notes a hymn to Amitayus written by the Sakya hierarch Phakpa (1235–1280) in 1258, but there is no reason to associate this work specifically with the Sakya order.[7] A thirteenth-century date is proffered for this painting, although it retains features seen in twelfth-century works, such as the cloud-borne deities flanking the top of the *shikhara* (compare with those in the twelfth-century Ushnishavijaya, cat. no. 6; and in the twelfth-century One-Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara, cat. no. 12), and the similarly rendered standing attendants (compare those in the twelfth-century Buddha, cat. no. 15; and in the ca. 1200 Buddhist Hierarch, cat. no. 17). Despite these earlier elements, the painting shares a wealth of features with other thirteenth-century works. Amitayus shares with the early-thirteenth-century Amitabha (cat. no. 23b) an elegant, similarly drawn head and torso. The coloration and drawing of their respective lotus petals are also similar, with curling leaves that resemble frothy waves. The lotus petals also resemble those in the thirteenth-century Amoghasiddhi (cat. no. 25) and Maitreya (cat. no. 24). Amitayus's robes, an iconographic feature associated with his *nirmanakaya* (emanational body), or earthly form, show an understanding of and appreciation for Chinese silks. Marked with gold roundels containing flowers, the red upper robe is arranged in loose, rich patterns, sometimes folded to expose the underside of a fabric in contrasting but complementary colors and designs. The painting attests to the existence of Amitayus worship in the central regions of Tibet in the thirteenth century, and future studies may associate this work more closely with specific developments in central Tibet at that time. JCS

1 Tucci, *Spiti and Kunavar*, 1988, p. xxxvii.
2 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 350.
3 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 349–50.
4 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 350.
5 The names of the seven Buddhas differ in various accounts, but the following is a frequently occurring roster: Vipashyin, Shikhin, Vishvabhuk, Krakucchanda, Kakutsunda, Kanakamuni, and Kashyapa.
6 Pal 1983, pp. 134, 259.
7 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 350.



29: Detail

30. Portrait of an Abbot

Central Tibet (a Kagyu monastery), ca. 1350
Distemper on cloth
77 x 59.7 cm (30 ⅜ x 23 ½ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Philanthropic Fund Gift, 1991 (1991.304)

This painting exhibits an eclectic blend of Nepalese and eastern Indian styles as well as other features that point to a mid-fourteenth-century date. The abbot is shown in *bhumisparsha mudra* (the earth-touching gesture); he sits on a lotus that rests on a throne base inhabited by lions and elephants. These are not the truncated animals of the earlier paintings, with just heads and front feet or paws showing, but rather the entire creature is seen in a profile portrayal. The lions sit up on their haunches, heads turned inward; their heads and tails overlap the upper and lower horizontal moldings of the throne base. A throne cloth emblazoned with lions chasing each other's tails falls over the center of the base, backed by a yellow frame rather than the traditional void. The hierarch is attired in a particularly splendid gold-patterned mantle, and even his red undergarment, usually undecorated, is adorned with a pattern of small rosettes and a narrow gold border. The same ornamental tendency can be seen in the outline of the mantle. Fabric surrounds the severe profile of the knees in undulating folds, softening the form, and lappets of cloth fall over the legs.[1] These stylized but observed details herald the more naturalistic treatment of attire that is seen in the mature Tibetan style of the mid-fifteenth century. The form of the throne back is typical of the eastern Indian style, with the addition of the small *kinnaras* perched on the ends of the lower bar, but the *torana* is Nepalese in format, with a squatting Garuda at the top flanked by *nagarajas*, snakes, and addorsed *makaras* with foliate tails. Also unusual is the form of the scrolling vegetation around the nimbus, absent in the Nepalese-style *thankas* but appearing here in the form of small tufts of foliage interspersed with lotus buds. The whole ensemble is surrounded by a rainbow.

At the center of the bottom register is a small pool. In its midst is a *vishvavajra* with a lotus flower emerging from the center. The lotus is a symbol of transcendent purity and, as the sacred navel from which the imagery springs, the *vishvavajras* reinforce this. On this lotus is set a water pot (*ghara*) encircled by ribbons tied into bows at its sides (see cat. no. 17). From the pot comes yet another lotus plant, scrolling about the figures of deities and religious progenitors that fan out to the left and right and along the sides of the painting. A central stalk supports the throne base and is theoretically the source of the lama's lotus seat. The scrolls on the left side of the painting are occupied by a series of mahasiddhas, on the right by a lineage of abbots, and beneath by protective deities (from left to right): Mahakala, Gurgonpo Lhamo, Kubera, Tara, and a monk. The top register shows a Kagyu lineage with Phakmo Drupa at the center and featuring many of the well-known progenitors of the sect (see cat. no. 17). This inhabited-scroll motif has its roots in Indian art and appears in Tibet as early as the late twelfth century (see cat. no. 22). SMK

1 A more exaggerated version can be seen in several late-fourteenth-century portraits from Taklung monastery; see Singer 1997, pls. 44, 48, 49.



31. Palden Lhamo

Central Tibet, 14th century
Distemper on cloth
73.7 x 58.4 cm (29 x 23 in.)
Pritzker Collection

Palden Lhamo (Glorious Goddess) is a Tibetan form of the ancient Indian goddess Shridevi. Like her Indian precursor, Palden Lhamo rides a mule whose haunch is marked with an eye, an iconographic element associated with an early myth surrounding Shridevi. Once, while queen of Sri Lanka, Shridevi strenuously objected to her husband's practice of human sacrifice and threatened to kill their son if her husband's barbarism did not cease. When human sacrifice continued, she carried out her promise. As the goddess mounted a mule (covered with the flayed skin of her son) to flee the kingdom, the king aimed an arrow in her direction, hitting the mule's haunch. Shridevi removed the arrow and magically transformed the wound into an eye, thus augmenting her powers to see and watch over the realms of the Buddhist faith.

Giuseppe Tucci and René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz have explored the development of Palden Lhamo in Tibet, demonstrating that while she served as a protector of the Buddhist faith (*dharmapala*)—the only female deity to do so—she was also associated with ancient pre-Buddhist deities, including those connected with the creation and suppression of disease.[1] Her cult is said to have been introduced to Tibet by Urgyen Sangwa Sherab (act. 10th century?), perhaps the historical figure on the left in the top register. Although little is known about her early veneration, when worshiped by the Sakya and then the Gelukpa order, especially from the sixteenth century onward, this goddess became associated with the protection of Lhasa and of the Dalai Lama.[2]

While she often appears in early Tibetan paintings as a subsidiary protector goddess (see cat. nos. 14, 17, 30), she is rarely depicted as the main subject in early paintings. This is the earliest such example published to date. Very little of the early liturgy is associated with Palden Lhamo, and one can offer only the most tentative identification of her entourage, based on later textual sources that only imperfectly match the iconography presented here. In this painting, the goddess holds a skull cup and a flaming sword, its hilt made of a scorpion.[3] From her right earring a lion emerges; from the left, a snake. She cradles, under her left arm, a sack made from the skin of a mongoose, spilling jewels, but also described in the literature as containing diseases. A crescent moon appears in her headdress, and a solar disk adorns her navel. She rides on a sea of blood, indicated here by the dark red platform supporting her mount, below which swelling liquid is carefully delineated. Dark scrolls appear beneath and behind her mount, who is confronted by a *makara*-headed goddess (*makarakuti*), wearing a cape of flayed human skin, the left half of whose body is emaciated. In the two side registers are twelve attendant goddesses, none of whom corresponds precisely with known iconographic descriptions of Shridevi's retinue; they are probably the twelve Tansrung, whom Tucci describes as "ancient native deities of Tibet."[4] Their wrathful appearance resembles that of the main goddess, and all ride fantastical animal mounts, including a dragon, a camel, a *makara*, and a nine-headed beast. In the bottom register are six further attendants: four goddesses riding mules, a standing deity wearing a flayed human skin, and another borne by a large bird. The full significance of this raw, powerful work will remain uncertain until future research more precisely determines the time and place of its execution and the full intent behind its wildly imaginative iconography. JCS

1 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 590–94; Tucci, *Tsaparang*, 1989, pp. 96–103; and Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975.
2 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 590–91; New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, p. 301.
3 Heller, "Notes," 1997.
4 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 591.



32. Chakrasamvara Mandala

Central Tibet, ca. first half of the 14th century
Distemper on cloth
68.6 x 57.2 cm (27 x 22½ in.)
Pritzker Collection

This vibrant painting depicts Chakrasamvara and his consort, Vajravarahi, together with the deities who form their sacred assembly (mandala). The four-headed, twelve-armed Chakrasamvara embraces Vajravarahi as he clasps the thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*) and the ritual bell (*ghanta*); his other arms hold the skin of an elephant, hand drum, ritual chopper, three ceremonial staffs, skull cup, noose, and head of the Hindu god Brahma. Kalaratri and Bhairava are trampled underfoot. Both central figures are adorned with the white bone ornaments and the necklaces of skulls and severed heads traditionally worn by wrathful Esoteric Buddhist deities. Just outside Chakrasamvara's fiery halo are scenes associated with the eight cremation grounds (*smashanas*); these abbreviated scenes provide an interesting comparison with the more fully developed narrative in the earlier Chakrasamvara Mandala (cat. no. 2).

Observing iconographic prescriptions for this deity, the artist included five groups of deities meant to form five concentric circles, but here they are arranged in registers. Within the main rectangle of the painting, resting on lotuses associated with the four cardinal points of the compass, are: Dakini (east, blue), Lama (north, green), Khandaroha (west, red), and Rupini (south, yellow). At the intermediate points of the compass are four skull cups (*kapalas*) that rest on vases supported by lotuses and that contain "the thought of enlightenment," blood, the five ambrosias, and "the five awakenings."[1] The second circle is called "the circle of thought" (*chittachakra*); it is represented by the eight blue male and female couples in the top register. The third circle, "the circle of speech" (*vakchakra*), is represented by the eight red male and female couples in the top and upper side registers. The fourth circle, "the circle of body" (*kayachakra*), can be seen in the white male and female couples in the side registers. And the fifth circle, "the circle of intuition" (*samayachakra*), appears in the lower register in the form of eight deities; the bicolored figures bear the colors associated with those quadrants of the mandala they are meant to bisect.

Of considerable interest are the sixteen goddesses in the bottom register who appear in front of a red curtain. Each bears an offering, such as dance, song, incense, food, or garlands, which they present to the main figures in the mandala.

The style of this painting may be compared with that of the late-thirteenth- or early-fourteenth-century painting of Scenes from the Life of the Historical Buddha (cat. no. 27). Like that work, this painting is bordered by red, green, and white rectangles surrounded by gold, a motif that suggests colored gems with gold settings. Both paintings also rely on a similar motif to distinguish registers within the painting (here, seen above the bottom register). The lotus petals in the two paintings are similar, as are the figures rendered by broad color fields with only occasional attempts at modeling. Costumes are also closely related, most especially those of the sixteen offering goddesses in this work and those of Sujata and the female attendants of the bodhisattva prince in the earlier work (cat. no. 27). It is also interesting to compare this work with the slightly later mandala seen here (cat. no. 43). The paintings differ chiefly in composition. Chakrasamvara and his consort dominate the later composition, as they are larger in height and width than in this work; they are also proportionally larger than their attendant deities, who are almost uniformly diminutive. The dominance of Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi in the later work contrasts with that in the work under consideration, wherein less of the composition's area is given to Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi, and the size of the attendant figures increases as one moves toward the bottom of the painting. Thus, while both paintings fulfill essentially the same iconographic requirement, differences in composition, color tone, and the artist's technical virtuosity all contribute to the different aesthetics seen in the two paintings. JCS

1 For the names of all the deities in this mandala, see Mallmann 1975, pp. 50–52.



33. Jnanatapa

Eastern Tibet (Riwoche monastery), 14th century
Distemper on cloth
68.5 x 54.6 cm (27 x 21½ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Friends of Asian Art Gifts, 1987 (1987.144)

This painting of the Tantric practitioner Jnanatapa was created for Riwoche monastery in eastern Tibet during the fourteenth century. Surrounding the central figure are the progenitors and abbots of Taklung monastery, of which Riwoche was a branch (see illustration below). The two latest historical figures (nos. 6 and 7), identified by inscription, are Onpo Lama Rinpoche (1251–1296), fourth abbot of Taklung and founder of Riwoche, and his young disciple, Choku Orgyan Gonpo (1293–1366), who became second abbot of Riwoche.[1]

About 1273, a schism arose within the Taklung community over the issue of who was to control the monastery. Historical accounts differ in their interpretation of these events, but it seems that Sangye Yarjon, the third abbot of Taklung, had promised the abbot's chair to two nephews, Onpo and Mangalaguru. When Sangye Yarjon died, Onpo, aged twenty-two, assumed the hierarch's position for one year. In 1273, his older cousin, Mangalaguru (1231–1297), took control of the monastery and Onpo fled to Kham, in eastern Tibet, where in 1276 he founded Riwoche.[2]

Despite some intriguing clues, the identity of the central figure in this painting was a mystery until recently. When the painting was uncovered in recent years, attached to it was a silk cloth inscribed with the name "Jnanatapa." The figure depicted under an arch, directly above the central figure and thus in the position where one would expect his teacher to be, is identified by inscription as "Avagarbha." The identity of the central figure became clear after reference to a chapter on Onpo Lama Rinpoche in a Taklung history written by Ngawang Namgyal (1571–1626). Onpo's biography includes a tale about one of his previous lives in India. Ngawang Namgyal states that in his Indian incarnation, Onpo was "the peerless mahasiddha Jnanatapa," and his Tantric teacher was Avagarbha, a Bengali siddha in the tradition of Tilopa and Naropa.[3] Remarkably, here we have a painting that illustrates the spiritual lineage of Riwoche

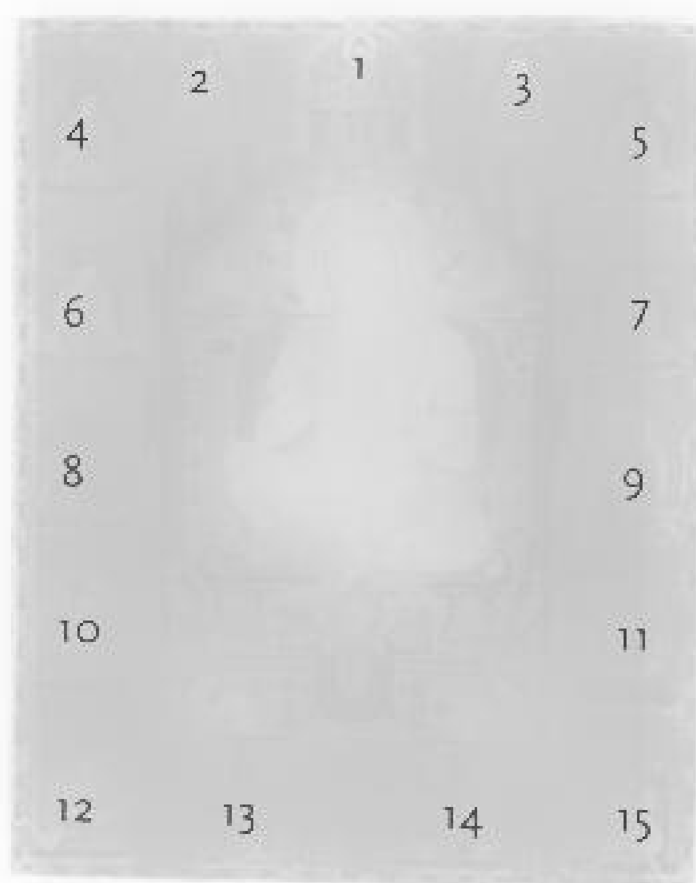


DIAGRAM OF FIGURES IN THE JNANATAPA PAINTING

1. Avagarbha (*a ba garba*)

2. Phakmo Drupa (identified by an epithet, *bde gshegs rin po che*)

3. Tashipel (*rje thang pa chen po*)

4. Second Taklung abbot, Kyual Rinpoche (*sku yal rin pa[po] che*)

5. Third Taklung abbot, Sangye Yarjon (*rje sangs rgya yar byon*)

6. Fourth Taklung abbot and founder of Riwoche, Onpo Lama Rinpoche (*rje sangs rgyas dbon*)

7. Second abbot of Riwoche, Choku Orgyan Gonpo (*cho sku o rbyan[rgyan] mgon po*)

8. Indian mahasiddha, Saraha (*sar ha pa*)

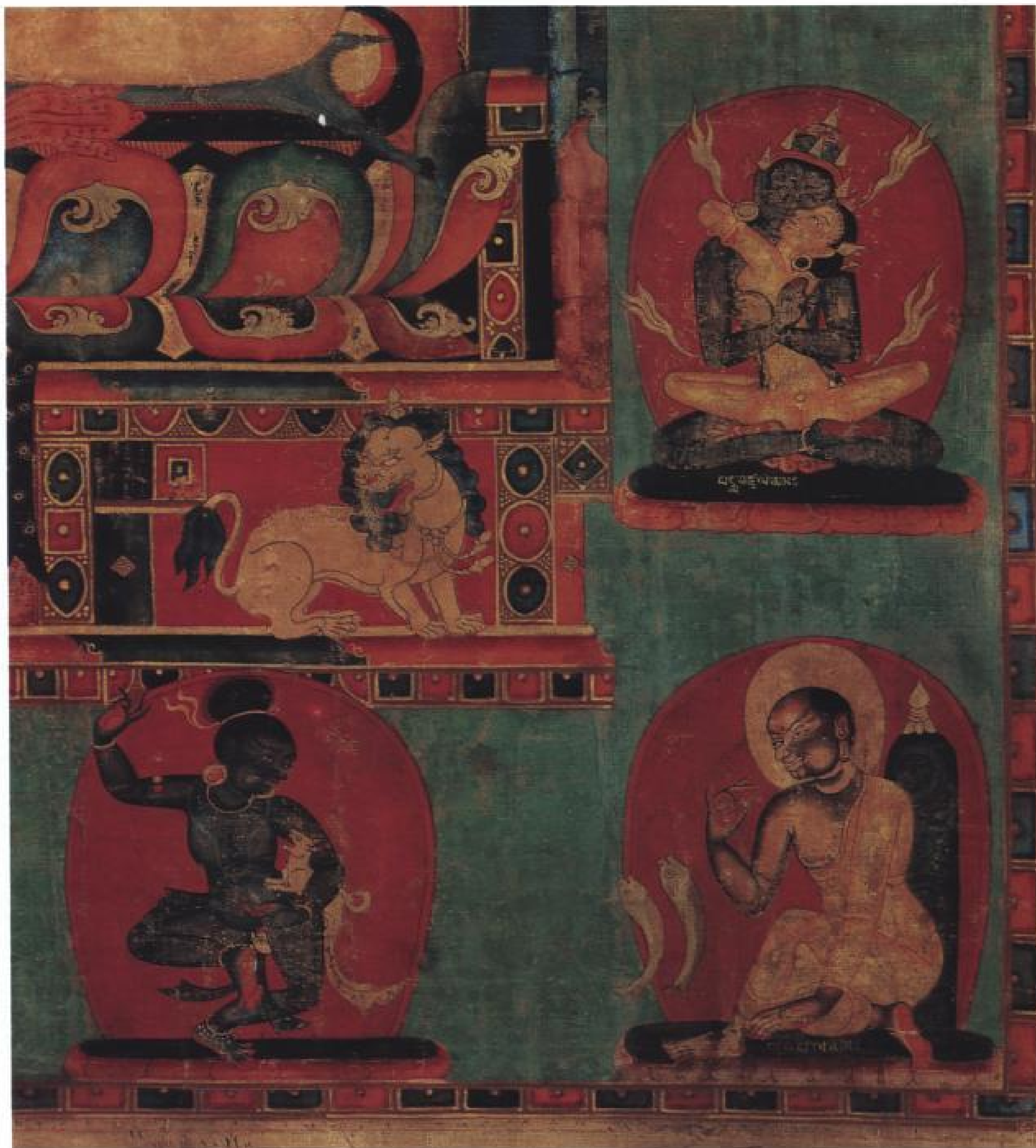
9. Indian mahasiddha, Indrabhuti (*i ndra bhu ti*)

10. Illegible

11. Padmavajra (*padma bdzra*)

12. Illegible 13. Rajachakra(?) (*ra bha rtsa ka*) 14. Illegible
15. Indian mahasiddha, Luipa (*la[lu] ha[hi] pa*)





33: Detail

monastery, featuring at its center a portrait of one of the Indian incarnations of its founder. Why Onpo's Indian incarnation should have been considered a worthy subject for portraiture is unclear, but one recalls the Tibetan concern for the purity of its spiritual lineages, which were often judged by their unbroken links with respected Indian masters.[4]

Another factor might also have influenced this choice of iconography. Medieval Mahayana Sanskrit texts, notably Shantideva's *Bodhicharyavatara*, the *Avalokana Sutra*, and the *Bhaisajyaguru Sutra*, all translated into Tibetan, emphasize the importance of *jatismara*, the recollection of one's former lives. In discussing this practice, the Indian historian Gregory Schopen notes that by remembering former lives, a Buddhist is able to garner more quickly the lessons of his past and avoid negative rebirth.[5] There is a long tradition within Buddhist art of representing the former lives of the historical Buddha (known as Jataka tales). This portrait may point to a parallel tradition within Tibetan art, in which the previous lives of respected hierarchs became a theme, an intriguing aspect of Tibetans' biographies of their revered saints.[6]

The style of this painting is startlingly different from that associated with Taklung in central Tibet. The mountain staves, a motif frequently seen in paintings from Taklung and other sites in central Tibet, are used here with greater restraint, merely suggesting a mountain cave setting for Jnanatapa. The Riwoche artist places Jnanatapa and the other portraits against a relatively empty background, a feature seen in none of the paintings associated with the Taklung center. A second notable difference in this style is the emphasis on shading to suggest three-dimensional form, seen especially in the depictions of its mahasiddhas, a technique not typical of earlier painting from central Tibet. It is likely that eastern Tibet had its own local painting traditions, adopted by the successors of Onpo Lama Rinpoche at Riwoche. JCS

1 Ngawang Namgyal 1972, p. 904 ff. See also Kossak 1990 and Singer 1997, pp. 65–67.
2 Roerich 1979, pp. 631, 650–52.
3 Ngawang Namgyal 1972, p. 872. I am grateful to Gyurme Dorje for bringing this passage to my attention.
4 Jnanatapa also appears in an earlier Onpo portrait painting, published in Singer and Denwood 1997, pl. 41. In a side register to the proper right of the central figure, Jnanatapa wears his distinctive helmet, carrying a small horn and holding a casket surmounted by a lion.
5 Schopen 1993.
6 The Tibetan historian Go Lotsawa mentions other Tibetans of this period who are said to have remembered their former lives; for instance, Rinchen Sengge (d. 1337). See Roerich 1979, p. 282, and passim.

34. Book Cover with Scenes from the Life of the Buddha

Tibet (Nepalese artist), late 12th–early 13th century
Distemper on wood
58 x 18 cm (22⅞ x 7⅛ in.)
Private collection



This book cover is divided into six sections, each showing a scene from the life of the Buddha. They are, from left to right, the Buddha taming a wild elephant, the temptation of Mara, the Buddha protected by the serpent Mucalinda, the Buddha preaching his first sermon, the miracle of Shravasti (where the Buddha multiplied himself), and the death of the Buddha (*parinirvana*). The size is unusual: it seems to be narrower than most Tibetan book covers but wider than those found in Nepal. The ends of the cover are badly damaged; the first scene and part of the last are largely obliterated, but, except for one other small area of damage, what survives is extraordinary in its lively drawing, decorative invention, and variety of depictions. Throughout the vignettes the artist has captured the inner life of the participants and conveyed a sense of subtle movement. Each is filled with a profusion of activity more typical of the Nepalese than the eastern Indian tradition. This cover lacks miniaturized detail, a hallmark of most thirteenth-century Nepalese-style *thankas* and book covers that we will examine. In these respects, as well as in its repertoire of everyday events, it is close in spirit to the *thanka* of Virupa (cat. no. 35).

The work is particularly difficult to date since it shares few similarities with *thankas* or other book covers, which tend to be more iconic. However, the throne on which the Buddha sits preaching is similar in profile to those in the Nepalese-style Tathagata series (cat. no. 36a–c), even though it is double-tiered. The throne back in the book cover is wider than those in the series, and it lacks the projecting struts, so the *torana* rests squarely on it rather than on extended arms. This alternate type of throne is seen along with a throne back of the Tathagata type in a manuscript cover dating to about 1100.[1] The *torana*, with its



addorsed *makaras*, is similar in form to the one seen in this early book cover. Also similar is the single row of lotus petals that comprises the seat of the deity. Another useful comparison is with an illumination from a Nepalese *Pancharaksha* (Five Goddesses) manuscript dating to about 1250.[2] There, the cowering horrific attendant on the right is similar in attitude to one here in the lower right of the Shravasti scene, but it is altogether more rigid in posture. The same can be said of the palm trees in the illumination, which have a similar lack of grace. Therefore, an earlier date for the book cover, in the last quarter of the twelfth or the first quarter of the thirteenth century, seems appropriate. Potentially, then, this cover is the earliest Nepalese-style work we know to have been made for a Tibetan patron. It is also interesting to note that the rectangular object in front of the preaching Buddha is probably a representation of the outer surface of a Tibetan book cover (fig. 7). SMK

1 Pal 1974–78, vol. 2, pl. 23 (the Swali collection, Bombay). It is also used for subsidiary deities in the early-fourteenth-century Shalu murals.
2 Ibid., vol. 2, pl. 27, bottom.

35. Virupa

Tibet (Sakya monastery), ca. second quarter of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
55.9 x 49.8 cm (22 x 19 ⅝ in.)
The Kronos Collections

The corpulent mahasiddha Virupa is seated, supported by a meditation strap and by his lowered right hand. With his raised left hand he points toward a disk that probably represents the sun. To his left stands a woman with green skin who proffers a skull cup (*kapala*) as a tray set with a wine flask and cups floats between them. Behind Virupa sits a small bearded figure holding a ritual implement whose bottom half disappears into another skull cup. The scene is set beneath a five-lobed arch surrounded by stylized mountain staves that rest on cubelike rocks. Three small deities appear within aureoles in the upper frame: a Chakrasamvara and consort on the right, a Vajrayogini at the center, and a Hevajra and consort to the left. Eighty-two vignettes set within squares surround the central figures; each contains a scene from the life of one of the mahasiddhas.

The central image probably alludes to a crucial moment in the life of Virupa. While studying at Nalanda monastery, he became discouraged when he felt that his meditation on Chakrasamvara had been unsuccessful. In a dream he received instruction in the mysteries of Hevajra from the goddess Vajrayogini and finally achieved an enlightened state. He then gave up his cloistered existence and, abandoning the robes of a monk, began to lead the life of a wanderer. One day he reached a tavern and ordered beer from the serving maid. He drank again and again, to the point where the maid became distressed that he might not be able to pay his bill. She asked for payment, and he agreed that he would stop drinking at noon. He then raised his hand and stopped the sun in its path. After Virupa had been drinking for three days, the local king came to restore cosmic order. He paid Virupa's bill, and the mahasiddha relented. The incident is symbolic of Virupa's transcendent wisdom, the power of which could stay the passage of time and, therefore, the stream of existence.

In the painting, the maid has been transformed into a green-skinned goddess, perhaps Tara, the Buddhist savioress. The skull cup, a common Tantric appurtenance, is offered not only here, where the wine cups and flask remain untouched on the tray, but also in the surrounding vignettes, where rondelles contain hands that offer a skull cup to the siddhas below. By extension, the skull cup is a symbol of Tantra and its transcendent wisdom. According to



35: Detail



legend, Virupa appeared to the founder of the Sakya order, Khon Konchok Gyelpo (1034–1102), and instructed him in the *Hevajra Tantra*. This doctrine is the central component of the Sakya teachings.[1] An inscription on the reverse states that Virupa is surrounded by his retinue of eighty mahasiddhas, whereas eighty-four is the canonical number. Although some of the eighty-two surrounding siddhas can be identified, at least half seem to be generic portrayals, which seems to indicate the lack of a specific iconographic instruction manual that the artist could follow.[2]

The style of the painting is almost purely Nepalese; the only Indian element is the lobed arch surrounding the principal scene. The animated figures, with round faces and stylized physiognomies, are purely Nepalese, as are many of the motifs: the prismatic rocks, the trees shaped like lollipops and surrounded by foliate plumes, and the swirling foliate rondelles that fill the background of the main scene (the earliest appearance of this last motif). This motif became extremely popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when it was used to embellish what would otherwise have been solid fields of color (see cat. nos. 45–47). The mountain staves are common to both traditions, but in the Nepalese version they take on a more blunted form.

The painting is particularly important because it has an inscription stating that "the rite of consecration of this [painting] of the Great Lord of Yoga, Virupa, with his retinue of eighty mahasiddhas was done by Sakya Pandita."[3] Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) was the lineage holder of Sakya monastery from 1216 until his death. He was summoned in 1244 by the Mongol prince Goden (the second son of Khan Ogodei) and reached Liangzhou in 1247, never to return to Tibet. Therefore, it is likely that the painting was executed sometime between 1216 and 1244. It is the only thirteenth-century painting made by a Nepalese artist for a Tibetan patron that can be securely dated as well as definitively associated with Sakya monastery. It is also one of the very few early Tibetan paintings known to have been consecrated by an important hierarch. SMK

1 Deshung Rinpoche 1995, p. 9; see also Kossak 1997, pp. 33–35.
2 Linrothe 1995. The tally of eighty-four may be arrived at if Virupa and his male companion are added to the eighty-two vignettes. This still does not explain the inscription which, to be correct, should read eighty-two or eighty-three.
3 Translation by Jane Casey Singer.

36. Three Tathagatas

a. Ratnasambhava
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Sakya monastery?), first half of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
H: 41 cm (16⅛ in.)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase (M.81.90.5)

b. Amitabha
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Sakya monastery?), first half of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
41.3 x 33 cm (16¼ x 13 in.)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Gift of John Goelet (67.818)

c. Amoghasiddhi
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Sakya monastery?), first half of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
39.5 x 31 cm (15½ x 12¼ in.)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection (1994.148.609)

The small scale and extraordinarily refined detail seen in this set of paintings presages the quality of the Cleveland Green Tara (cat. no. 37), where the artistry seen here reached its peak. Three paintings of Tathagatas from an original set of five have survived. It would seem that they were executed by an artist skilled in the techniques of miniaturist illumination for palm-leaf manuscripts, one who did not adapt his methods to the larger format but simply applied them to these small-scale *thankas*. Even minor passages are exquisite not only in their craftsmanship but also, in equal measure, in their subtlety. They are imbued with internal energy that informs the details: the menacing lions, the rampant vegetal scrolling, the fierce Garuda, and the cowering serpent deities. Even the attendant bodhisattvas accentuate the movement inherent in their pose by lifting a foot. At the same time, an inward sensibility pervades the central Buddhas and their immediate attendants. Many of the areas of solid color are seen, on careful



36a



36a: Detail

inspection, to be enlivened by miniature decorative devices, drawn in black, which are so dense that in some instances they tint the entire field (like the red of the aureoles behind the main deities). The figures possess an almost doll-like quality, and the overall effect of the ensemble is one of finely wrought ornament, not of monumental form, as in the eastern-Indian-inspired *thankas* (see cat. no. 23).

Many of the details of the compositions in this set are different from the contemporaneous Tathagata sets of eastern Indian inspiration. Here the Buddhas are set on thrones with elaborate back rests framed by intricate *toranas* rather than being simply seated against pillows with the suggestion of a back rest or *torana*. The style of this throne back, which derives from the traditional Nepalese repertoire, has already been discussed (see p. 42). It is interesting to note that, although details remain constant from picture to picture, the elements supporting the side bars are variable. Particularly charming is the inclusion of a pair of intertwined male and female *kinnaras*, Amoghasiddhi's vehicles, at the base of his throne back. Their intertwined tails fill the space that in the other *thankas* is reserved for an elephant, a lion, and a small *kinnara*. The elaborate elements that make up these thrones are much more energized than those seen, in the thrones of abbots, for example, from the earlier Bengali-inspired tradition. This tendency can be seen throughout the picture, for instance, in the bouquets of flowers—rather than individual blooms—that fall like rain from the sky.

The garb of the Tathagatas and standing bodhisattvas also varies from that seen in the earlier series (cat. no. 23). The Tathagatas' dhotis are longer, and an allover pattern sometimes replaces the striped one. Their belts are narrower and hang down from the waist; shawls follow the backs of the shoulders and hang behind the arms of the deities; crowns, armlets, and anklets have teardrop-shaped—rather than triangular—elements with foliate arms to either side; the large armlets, placed above circular bands, lack dangles; enormous hoop earrings are worn rather than earplugs; double strings of pearls replace some of the earlier necklaces and are enhanced by the addition of intricate necklaces with swags, tassels, and pendants. The standing bodhisattvas of each group are adorned with similar jewelry, but here it is less elaborate and profuse. Long transparent trousers are worn over brightly patterned undergarments. The ends of five long sashes fall in elaborate pleats along the lower part of the deities' bodies; three are attached to a belt at the front and sides. Another long sash forms a loop across the hips and is tied to the belt in small bows at the sides.



36b



36c

The number and poses of the seated listening bodhisattvas are also different. Here there are six rather than the usual eight or ten, and they sit in a frontal half-lotus posture. Most brace themselves by placing a hand on the lotus seat rather than by leaning forward to assume a *mudra* with both hands. The standing bodhisattvas flanking the Tathagatas vary: Ratnasambhava has a red Manjushri and a white Avalokiteshvara; Amitabha has a yellow Mahasthamaprapta[1] and a white Avalokiteshvara; Amoghasiddhi has a red Manjushri and a white Avalokiteshvara. The placement of four deities in a register at either side of the Garuda at the top of the paintings is unprecedented. It seems that groupings of four were thought to be auspicious, and here there are the four flanking bodhisattvas (one standing and three seated) as well as two groups of four deities in the top register.[2] The relationship of these groups to the main figure is not clear and is not firmly established from set to set. The identification of many of the deities in these registers has proved extremely difficult. In many cases, only their color, number of hands and heads, and attributes can be established. In the Ratnasambhava, there are two groups of four Tathagatas (Ratnasambhava is not portrayed). In the Amitabha, there is a similar group of Tathagatas (without Amitabha) on the left, but four different deities on the right: a seated eight-armed, eight-headed white deity, a blue horrific form of Manjushri, a seated blue deity, and a seated white deity with a pendant leg. In the Amoghasiddhi, there is no set of four Tathagatas. Instead, in the upper left, are: a five-headed white deity seated on a lotus and holding a book; a green deity with hands across the chest, seated on a lion; a god with a sword and perhaps a manuscript, seated with lotuses behind him; a gold Manjushri wielding a sword above his head; and a Shadakshari Lokeshvara. In the upper right are a yellow Vajrapani balancing a *chakra*, a Simhanada Lokeshvara, a dancing dakini, and a figure wearing a white robe and a red mantle patterned with gold.

The lower registers in the paintings portray a variety of figures: in the Ratnasambhava, from left to right, a Green Tara, Hayagriva, a four-armed god, Padmapani, and a Mahakala flanked by two goddesses; in the Amitabha, seven seated goddesses, all but one multiarmed (perhaps the seven mother goddesses); in the Amoghasiddhi, from right to left: Vajrapani in his form as Garuda;[3] Mahakala; Rahula; Vaishravana; a lay practitioner wearing a white robe and a red mantle, holding a *vajra* in his right hand and a *ghanta* in his left; offerings on stands sheltered by a gauze canopy with tassel ends; and the consecrating monk with an incense burner.

Although two paintings from the set had long been in museum collections, the Amoghasiddhi only recently entered the public domain. It proved crucial in establishing the Tibetan provenance of these paintings, for, as is usually the case, this is the painting in a Tathagata set that includes the consecrating monk. Here, his garb and the types of offerings, including the tripod stands, show that the set had been made for a Tibetan patron. Of further interest are the two figures in the painting who wore white robes, a sign that they were lay Buddhist practitioners. One is seen opposite the consecrating monk, holding a bell (*ghanta*) and a *vajra*, which proclaims him to be a devotee of Tantra. The other appears in the top right corner of the *thanka*, in a row with three deities. This highly unusual position for a layman can be explained if a Sakya provenance is assumed for the set. The Sakya lineage holder was always a member of the Khon clan but did not have to be an ordained monk, in which case a white inner robe was the garment of choice. Considering the long association of Sakya patrons and Nepalese artists, one or both of these figures are probably Sakya lineage holders, and the paintings are among the earliest Nepalese commissions for the order to survive. SMK

1 See Mallmann 1986, p. 241. Amitabha is the head of his family and Avalokiteshvara one of his chief companions.

2 Granoff 1968–69, p. 93, with reference to the *Hevajra Tantra*.

3 Hazra 1986, p. 86.

37. Green Tara

Attributed to the Nepalese artist Aniko
Central Tibet, third quarter of the 13th century
Distemper on cloth
52.1 x 43 cm (20½ x 16⅜ in.)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund (1970.156)

In many ways this masterpiece embodies but also transcends the most salient characteristics of the Nepalese style. Its small scale, exuberant detail, elaborate *torana*, throne elements with upturned ends, and the stylized physiognomy of the main deity indicate that it epitomizes the Nepalese tradition. All of these elements can be seen in a series of Tathagatas, probably commissioned by a Sakya hierarch from a Nepalese artist (cat. no. 36a–c). At the same time, the elaborate multistory shrine with a five-lobe opening and the throne base with stylized elephants and lions reflect familiarity with various elements associated with either the Indian Bengali style or the Bengali-inspired Tibetan version of it. Throughout, the drawing is more restrained than that of related Nepalese works (compare the foliate tails of the *makaras* in the *torana* or the animated beasts with the same elements in the Tathagatas) but freer and livelier than that of contemporaneous Tibetan models (cat. nos. 24, 25). Neither source prepares one for the sheer brilliance and originality of the Tara, surely the work of a great and inspired artist. Not since the Ford Tara (cat. no. 3) have we seen a painting commissioned by a Tibetan patron that is so programmatically ambitious and artistically accomplished.[1]

What is the source of its originality? Although both the Nepalese and the Indian tradition exerted tremendous influence on Tibetan painting in this formative period, the styles were rarely intermingled; paintings were executed in one or the other idiom. Here, they are not only combined but also melded into a seamless synthesis. The squat multitier Bengali temple shrine with its multicourse base is elaborated in its form and decoration far beyond anything found in either Tibetan or Indian paintings. The Nepalese genius for miniaturization is seen in the embellishment of each surface with a profusion of decorative motifs and in the representations of bas-relief sculptures that are technical tours de force, far beyond anything seen in earlier paintings. The space in the painting has a clarity and depth rarely encountered. The tones that have been chosen project the goddess and her throne forward (theoretically) from the interior of the somber shrine, which itself is set off from the background by a thicket of trees. Although the trees and architecture exist in relatively shallow space, the goddess is unusually three-dimensional. The nuances of her pose are clear: for example, the way in which her right arm, leg, and foot project forward, free of the throne, or the manner in which her shawl adds dimension to the planes of her lap and thighs. The volumes are strengthened by subtle shading that helps to clarify the forms. Such modeling is not unknown in the Indian-inspired tradition, but here it is used with a new level of effectiveness.

An attribution of this picture to Aniko is tempting,



37: Detail



because of its technical bravura and aesthetic accomplishment. This sixteen- or seventeen-year-old prodigy was first brought to Sakya monastery in 1260 as part of a group of eighty artisans—of which he was the self-proclaimed leader—to fulfill a commission by Khubilai Khan to build a commemorative *stupa* there to honor Sakya Pandita (see cat. no. 35). In 1262 Aniko was summoned by the Khan to Kaiping. In 1265 his superlative skills enabled him to repair for the Khan an extremely complex medical model, a chore that was beyond the capabilities of the court's artisans. By 1273 he was made "Supervisor in Chief of All Classes of Artisans of the Imperial Workshop," a post he held until his death in 1306. His biographies state that before he arrived in China he had become proficient in both Indian and Nepalese painting traditions, and that after he became a member of the Mongol court he mastered calligraphy as well. Despite his exalted position and extraordinary technical accomplishment, nothing survives that can be conclusively attributed to him, although a recent attempt has been made to assign to him two paintings in the National Palace Museum, Beijing.[2]

In the absence of any visual comparisons, Aniko's reported mastery of both the Nepalese and Indian traditions and his fame as an artisan of the exquisite are not enough to allow us to attribute the Tara to him. However, an additional factor seems to favor the attribution. In 1306 artists from the Yuan court were sent to Shalu to paint a series of murals (fig. 21). A number of facial characteristics seen there closely resemble those of the Tara, which would have been painted before Aniko went to China in 1262. All imperial artists were under Aniko's supervision, and the Shalu murals show a new artistic synthesis that undoubtedly reflects his influence: Central Asian decorative devices from the Yuan repertoire (which are a product of Aniko's stay in China, and therefore not pertinent to a discussion of the Tara) are combined with predominantly Nepalese but also Indian motifs. For example, the seated choruses of bodhisattvas are shown in both frontal (Nepalese) and profile (Indian) postures. Similarly, exaggerated Nepalese physiognomies are joined to elongated bodies typical of Indian art rather than to the squatter form associated with Nepal (see p. 42). Extensive use is made of subtle shading, another unusual device that is superbly handled in the Cleveland painting. The Tathagatas sit on thrones (atypical for the Indian tradition, but not for the Nepalese), but the seats are Indian in style. Thus, the Tara presages the style of the Shalu murals, and their similarities, along with what we know of Aniko's talents, certainly support at least a provisional attribution of the painting to this legendary Nepalese artist. SMK

1 For an extensive description of the intricacies of the iconography, see Seattle 1990, pp. 329–32.
2 Jing 1994.

38. Seated Mahakala

Central Tibet, late 13th century
53 x 39 cm (20⅞ x 15⅜ in.)
Distemper on cloth
Private collection

The four-armed horrific deity Mahakala sits on a lotus base in the posture of ease, *lalitasana*. He holds a skull cup (*kapala*) and a sword with his inner hands; a *khatvanga* (ceremonial staff) topped by a trident is held in his far left hand, and with his far right hand he makes the gesture of admonition.[1] A short striped dhoti is gathered under his bulging abdomen. Mahakala wears jewelry that includes a diadem of skulls and a golden snake that binds his hair. In the upper left corner of the painting is a standing horrific deity, perhaps another form of Mahakala, wearing a tiger skin, brandishing a sword, and holding a skull cup. In the other corner is a four-armed white Ganapati, the Buddhist form of the Hindu elephant-god, Ganesha. He holds a sweetmeat and a rat (his vehicle) in his inner hands and a bundle and sword in the outer ones.

The iconography of the principal deity is highly unusual; in Mahakala's four-armed guise he customarily holds a chopper and a skull cup in his principal hands and the sword and *khatvanga* in the outer ones. His usual tiger-skin dhoti is also absent.[2] Originally, Mahakala was a horrific form of the Hindu deity Shiva, who was later integrated into the Buddhist pantheon and given this new name. His ancestry is signified by the trident—a symbol of Shiva—that surmounts the *khatvanga*, as well as by the snakes and skulls, also ornaments of the Hindu god.



Many elements clearly reflect Nepalese influence: the textiles, the tentlike form above the main figure, the dense pattern of flowers in the background, the style of the jewelry, and the rather informal poses of the central figure and of Ganapati. The freedom of the drawing also seems related to Nepalese idioms. Note the splayed fingers and toes and the freedom with which the drapery ends are handled. Several elements of the painting are particularly like those seen in the Cleveland Museum's Green Tara (cat. no. 37). The form of the lotus base—with its plump, cushionlike, vertically striated, swollen carpels encircled by a decorated band with pearling on the lower side, a line on the upper side, and a white top—is extremely close.[3] The necklace, armlets, and anklets with a central foliate boss flanked by two upward-turning tendrils and bangles with ornamentation culminating in a peak are similar to those in the Tara and also relate to those depicted in the early Tathagata series (see cat. no. 23). Also similar is the heavy outlining of the end of the diaphanous scarf: black in the Tara, white here and in the Tathagatas. Clearly, these elements of the Mahakala, most definitively the first, emulate closely those seen in the Cleveland Tara—possibly a work of the Nepalese painter Aniko—and seem to indicate a date sometime in the later part of the thirteenth century. The way in which the flames of the nimbus grow organically from the fiery field also affirms the date. In the fourteenth century they become increasingly more stylized (see cat. nos. 40, 43, 44).

On the back of the painting there is a drawing of Heruka, a form of Chakrasamvara.[4] SMK

1 See cat. no. 14 for a further discussion of his iconography.
2 See cat. no. 36c, the second figure from the bottom right, for an example of the standard iconography.
3 The early Nepalese-style Tathagatas also have this cushionlike form but the petals do not encircle and reveal it in a similar fashion and no pearling is present.
4 See Pal 1997, p. 111.

39. Book Cover with Manjuvajra and Consort Flanked by Lamas

Central Tibet, late 13th century
Distemper on wood
14.4 x 42.4 cm (5⅝ x 16¾ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Louis V. Bell Fund, 1998 (1998.75)



A six-armed, three-headed Manjuvajra, an Esoteric form of the bodhisattva Manjushri, appears seated at the center, in ecstatic embrace with his consort, Vidyadhara, who also has six arms and three heads. They wear ornate crowns, hold the same attributes—in like order—and their faces touch. This arrangement corresponds to that specified in two Sanskrit texts, the *Nishpannayogavali* and the *Sadhanamala*.[1] The multihued petals of their lotus seat fan out to accommodate the golden aureole of stylized foliage that surrounds them.[2] At either side is a lama seated on a similar lotus and surrounded by a red nimbus. Just within the border of the nimbus is an arc of small decorative motifs, which frames the figures. The monks wear elaborately patterned mantles and deep red undergarments with a floral design. Beneath each patchwork undergarment is a patterned vest. They sit against large bolsters with a scrolling foliate design; two triangular projections at shoulder height are probably indications of a throne back. The monks gaze toward the central deities and hold their hands in gestures of instruction: at the right, a form of *vitarka mudra* (religious discourse) and to the left, *dharmachakra mudra* (the turning of the wheel of the law).[3] The green background of the cover is strewn with tumbling flowers.

The style of the painting is Nepalese, as can be seen from the type of crown and the jewelry, the facial characteristics of the deities, and the scrolling foliate pattern that fills the central nimbus. The quality of the portraiture is extremely sensitive, conveying not only a sense of great individuality but also one of inwardness. The restrained delineation of the lamas' costumes relates more to late-thirteenth- than to fourteenth-century examples, where the folds around the knees and across the legs of the figures have become more baroque (see cat. no. 30). Few book covers in this style are known, and this is one of the most sensitively painted and best preserved. The best-known example, in the collection of the British Museum, has a central scene of an enthroned Prajnaparamita flanked by bodhisattvas and surrounded by eighteen vignettes of monks and deities.[4] SMK

1 Mallmann 1986, p. 254.
2 As in Pala sculptures, the aureole is sometimes composed of flames or foliage. The Nepalese flame pattern is quite distinctive (see, for example, cat. no. 38), and stylized leaves are more likely.
3 The right-hand *mudra* is also called by some authors *dharmachakra mudra*. Saunders identifies it, in the Japanese context, as a form of *vitarka mudra*. See Saunders 1985, p. 74, and, for a general discussion of the class of hand gestures, pp. 66–75.
4 O.A. 1973.5-14.1, published in Zwalf 1985, no. 190, p. 137.



40. Mandala of Raktayamari in Ecstatic Embrace

A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet, first half of the 14th century
Distemper on cloth
66.7 x 54.6 cm (26¼ x 21½ in.)

The Kronos Collections

Yamari, also called Yamantaka, is the enemy or destroyer of Yama, the embodiment of death. Here, in his red (*rakta*) form, he stands on a buffalo set on a lotus base—his traditional support—and holds a skull cup and a white staff capped by a head and the prongs of a *vajra*. He wears a tiger skin and a scarf. He embraces his consort, Svabha-prajna, who also holds a skull cup filled with blood. Both are adorned with elaborate jewelry, including a garland of human heads, which is associated with Tantric practices. Multicolored flamelike motifs emerge from the red aureole that surrounds the main figures. In the upper left of the central field is a blue Yamantaka in ecstatic embrace, and in the upper right is a buffalo-headed blue Yamantaka. Four skull cups on lotus bases are placed below and at the sides of these figures. Raktayamari is surrounded on the sides and bottom of the painting (the bottom register is a replacement) by multiple emanations of Yamari-Yamantaka, some with consorts, others without. In the top register is a lineage containing a white-robed Sakya hierarch. The bottom register was missing and has been restored.

This *thanka* is in the Nepalese style, with squat, heavy-set figures. The scarf that winds down from Raktayamari's shoulders typically ends in billowing, elaborately pleated folds, given greater definition here by added colors (see cat. nos. 36, 41). The foliate flourishes atop the curves of the scarf are very similar to those found on Nepalese-style *toranas*. The color is saturated; the dark pink of the consort is particularly striking in relation to the reds of Raktayamari's figure and of the aureole. The Nepalese penchant for detail is not immediately apparent but is manifest in such areas as the minutely described jewelry and the pattern of the fabrics, for example, in the rondelles and the geometric motifs on the scarf. As in almost all thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Nepalese-style paintings, the outer registers are set off by narrow yellow bands rather than by the wide lotus-petal borders seen in works inspired by the Indian tradition. The treatment of the flames of the aureole is similar to that seen in one of the 1306 murals at Shalu that depicts Pagma Dorje.[1] SMR

1 Vitali 1990, pl. 48.



41. Vairochana with Attendants

A Nepalese artist
Tibet, first half of the 14th century
Distemper on cloth
59.4 x 61 cm (23⅜ x 24 in.)
Private collection

This *thanka*, whose lower register is missing, is one of a small group of surviving early-fourteenth-century paintings in the Nepalese style. Vairochana, the Buddha of the Zenith, can be identified by his white coloration and his gesture of *bodhyagri mudra* (wisdom fist). He is flanked by two female attendants. Most probably they are: to the right, a Green Tara holding a *vajra* and to the left, a blue Vajradhateshvara who also holds a *vajra*.[1] They stand in a frontal swaying posture, seemingly a variant of the ubiquitous *tribhanga* (thrice-bent) pose, previously used for standing bodhisattvas. Vairochana sits against a throne back that is very close in style to those seen in the early Nepalese-inspired Tathagata set (cat. no. 36); it has the same bar at the base of the lotus seat, an identical assemblage of animals to support the projecting bar at the top, and a *torana* that is similarly configured, but with the addition of two birds flanking the Garuda. Eight bodhisattvas seated in the half-lotus posture (also similar to those seen in the Tathagata series, cat. no. 36) make up a chorus of listeners. Some hold attributes, but it is not clear whether they are meant to be the auspicious Eight Bodhisattvas (see cat. no. 28). Small flaming aureoles at the left and the right of the inner top bodhisattvas surround dancing dakinis. Above, following the composition of the earlier series, is a short register with five deities in either corner (rather than the four seen in the earlier group): to the right, Ratnasambhava, Avalokiteshvara, Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi, and another deity; to the left, the five Tathagatas, Amoghasiddhi, Ratnasambhava, Avalokiteshvara, Vairochana, and Amitabha. The adornments worn by the principal deities reflect those seen in the earlier set. Note the parallel jewelry (which is also akin to that seen in the Shalu murals), including the large anklets, although here the armlets are seen in profile rather than head on. Here, Vairochana's dhoti is also worn over the knees, but the bodhisattvas' long trousers are made of striped rather than diaphanous fabric.

A number of variations from the usual configuration of elements clarify this *thanka*'s date as the first half of the fourteenth century. The painting seems to be based on the early Tathagata set. The throne back is obviously similar, although it has become less plastic; the bucket shape of the back has lost almost all its curvature. The only area in which some of the earlier concavity is still evident is at the intersection of the uprights and the back, where the back bar bends slightly. The projecting ends are also nearly parallel to the throne top rather than angled. The straight sides and the top of the throne are now almost totally visible since they are no longer covered by a large pillow. Also altered are the two lotus adornments that, in the early set, project upward from the throne back like spikes but are completely lacking in the murals. Here, they emerge from the junction of the nimbus and throne back and mirror the floral arms that surround the central boss of the crown. The flanking bodhisattvas (now female) are posed frontally, rather than in a half-profile, half three-quarter view. Although the configuration of the foliage in the *torana* corresponds quite closely to that seen in the early Tathagata set, it no longer exhibits the same bursting energy, having become somewhat languorous and decorative. Finally, the background of the painting is filled with scrolling rather than scattered falling bouquets.

Curiously, at the top center of the verso of the painting, "Vairochana" is written in early medieval Nepalese script, and in the Buddhist creed below it, penned in Tibetan letters, "dharma" is spelled with a double *m*, as it is in Nepali. This may be a further indication that the painting is the work of a Nepalese artist.[2] SMK

1 Hazra 1986, p. 57.
2 This hypothesis was proposed by Ian Alsop.



42. Vajrasattva and Consort

Central Tibet, first half of the 14th century
Distemper on cloth
61.9 x 52.1 cm (24 3/8 x 20 1/2 in.)
Musée National des Arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris (MA1089)

Although the format of this *thanka* is in some ways typical of early compositions—dominant enthroned central figures symmetrically flanked by standing and seated bodhisattvas but with no lineage—many of its stylistic details point to a date in the fourteenth century. In the Guimet *thanka*, the lower half of the consort's body dissolves behind her mate's thigh in an anatomically improbable fashion. Similar iconography is found in a *thanka* in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, that can be securely dated to the late eleventh century. There, the lower half of the consort's body is entirely visible,[1] and in Indian or Nepalese prototypes, the consort is always seated on the lap of, or next to, the main deity in a plausible fashion.[2] The postures of the standing bodhisattvas are particularly exaggerated; the back hips jut out sharply to produce a pronounced curvature of the bodies. In early examples (see cat. nos. 36a–c), the *tribhanga* (thrice-bent pose) is presented more clearly. A similar—if less pronounced—distortion is seen in the kindred figures of late-thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Bengali-style paintings (see cat. nos. 24, 25). Seated bodhisattvas are always in one of two poses: In Bengali-inspired *thankas*, they are shown with heads in three-quarter view; torsos are presented frontally and crossed legs lean to one side (cat. no. 23a). In Nepalese-style paintings the figures are mostly frontal, but sometimes the torso and head are slightly turned; in either position the legs are in a crossed lotus posture (see cat. no. 36a). In this *thanka*, both postures occur. Such a melding is first seen in the Shalu murals of the early fourteenth century (see fig. 21) that reflect Aniko's synthesis of two traditions. The pairs of lions in the throne base are also indicative of a fourteenth-century date: they are seen in profile with raised rumps and tails, but their heads turn to face the viewer. Bengali-style *thankas* of the eleventh through the thirteenth century consistently show only the heads and paws of such guardians. When the complete feline is depicted in profile, as in the section of a ritual crown (cat. no. 9), the tail is hardly visible as it passes between the legs of the cat, its tip coming to rest on a thigh. The closest parallels to the lions in this painting are those in the fourteenth-century Jnanatapa (cat. no. 33).

John Huntington provides the probable provenance of this work. It seems to have been acquired by Rahula Sankrityayana from Shalu monastery sometime in the 1930s and later brought to the West by Giuseppe Tucci. It passed through the hands of another Italian collector and was then given to the Musée Guimet.[3] Our knowledge of early Shalu painting is restricted to the murals of the early eleventh and the early fourteenth centuries. Two of the anomalous features found in this *thanka* are present in the later murals: the integration of the Indian-style posture with the Nepalese in the seated bodhisattvas and the upward curving tails of the lions.[4] A date in the first half of the fourteenth century, consistent with our other deductions, is probable. SMK

1 Seattle 1990, no. 105.
2 Schroeder 1981, pls. 54A, 84A.
3 Seattle 1990, p. 327 n. 2.
4 See Vitali 1990, pl. 71, for the seated bodhisattvas, and pl. 72, for the lions.



43. Mandala of Paramasukha Chakrasamvara

Central Tibet, ca. 1400
Distemper on cloth
80 x 73 cm (31½ x 28¾ in.)
Private collection

This painting depicts the mandala of Samvara, often described as "the wheel [*chakra*] of supreme bliss [*paramasukha*]." The rapture associated with a profound understanding of Samvara's teachings is here expressed explicitly by the act of sexual love. According to Buton Rinpoche (1290–1364), the Celestial Buddha Vajradhara (shown here at the center of the top register) assumes the form of Chakrasamvara in order to overcome the very obstacles to liberation that this form seems to embody: wrath, sexual passion, and ignorance. As Robert Linrothe has observed, "Terrifying deities in sexual embrace expose the enigma at the heart of [Late] Esoteric Buddhism: poison as its own antidote, harnessing obstacles as one force impelling liberation."[1] The union signifies the fusion of wisdom and compassion. At the center, the god Samvara embraces his consort, Vajravarahi (the Diamondlike Sow). The deity appears in his four-face, twelve-arm form. Two of the arms hold a stretched elephant skin behind him; others hold: hand drum, hatchet, chopper, trident, ceremonial staff, skull cup, noose, and head of the Hindu god Brahma. Samvara grasps a bell and a *vajra* (ritual thunderbolt) as he embraces Vajravarahi. His left leg is held taut; the right knee is bent in a powerful stance (the *alidha* posture), as he tramples Bhairava and Kalaratri, symbols of the (false) distinction between mundane existence (*samsara*) and spiritual liberation (*nirvana*). Samvara and Vajravarahi appear against a red halo enveloped by gold-tipped flames.

The composition of this painting differs from that of the twelfth-century Chakrasamvara mandala in this exhibition (cat. no. 2). Here, the central deity and his consort dominate the painting, occupying most of the inner rectangle. The five "circles" of deities are arranged along the side and bottom registers, whereas in the earlier example they are arranged in concentric circles within a mandala palace. It is unclear whether such differences in composition had any particular significance for the practitioner. In the first "circle," here placed within the inner rectangle, are Dakini (blue, marking the east), Lama (green, marking the north), Khandaroha (red-orange, marking the west), and Rupini (yellow, marking the south). Also within this "circle" and intended to mark the intermediate points of the compass are skull cups atop vases, said to be filled with the thought of enlightenment (*bodhichitta*, southeast), blood (southwest), the five ambrosias (*panchamrta*, northwest), and the five illuminations (*panchapradipa*, northeast). The second circle, described as the "circle of thought" (*chittachakra*) includes eight deities marking the main points of the compass and the intermediate points.[2] Further groups of eight deities mark the third, fourth, and fifth circles, said to be the circles of speech (*vakchakra*), body (*kayachakra*), and intuition (*samayachakra*), respectively.

Another painting depicting a slightly different form of Chakrasamvara, probably produced by the same workshop and belonging to the same set of paintings, has been published and described in detail by Marylin Rhie and Robert Thurman.[3] Both paintings include very similar consecratory scenes in the bottom register. Under a textile canopy, a Tibetan monk is seated on a low platform before a table containing ritual implements; a higher, longer table laden with vases of flowers is also depicted. Like the previously published example, this work was probably commissioned by the Sakya order, since the side registers include figures wearing Sakya-style red peaked caps. JCS

1 Linrothe 1999, pp. 301, 330.
2 This mandala's iconography follows a description in the twelfth chapter of the *Nishpannayogavali*. For identification of the remaining deities in Samvara's circles, see Mallmann 1975, pp. 50–52, 187–89; see also New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 216–19.
3 New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 216–19.



44. Mandala of Mahavajrabhairava

Central Tibet, second half of the 14th century
Distemper on cloth
81.3 x 71.8 cm (32 x 28¼ in.)

Pritzker Collection

This painting features Mahavajrabhairava (the Great Diamond-like Ferocious One), a wrathful aspect of the bodhisattva Manjushri. The god's nine heads are arranged in three tiers, with that of the peaceful Manjushri at the center of the upper tier. In his thirty-four hands he holds instruments signifying his awesome power; the uppermost pair of hands holds a flayed elephant skin—symbolizing the overcoming of ignorance—and the pair at his chest hold the skull cup (*kapala*) and chopper (*kartrika*). The sixteen-legged god is surrounded by a fiery halo whose tips are emblazoned with gold scrollwork. Mahavajrabhairava turns his gaze downward and to his left, as if to confront an unfortunate foe. His long orange hair sweeps upward like a fierce flame, forming a halo for his many heads, each crowned with a gruesome diadem of skulls. Delicate white bone ornaments adorn his chest, waist, ankles, arms, and neck, and the ithyphallic god wears a long necklace of severed heads. In the side registers are twelve aspects of Vajrabhairava embracing a consort. In the bottom register are the ten guardians of the directions (*dikpala*), all on fanciful mounts: Indra, Yama, Varuna, Kubera, Agni, Nairrti, Vayu, Ishana, Brahma, and Ananta; also, Panjara Mahakala and Yama, Lord of Death. In the top register are the celestial progenitor Vajradhara (at the center), Indian mahasiddhas, and Tibetan monks.

Mahavajrabhairava was known in an earlier iconographic form as Yamantaka (Destroyer of Death), and even in this form, he is sometimes known by this epithet.[1] The bull's head and fierce countenance that he shares with Yama, Lord of Death, is the form he assumes in order to beguile Yama and quell his deadly deeds.[2] Indian myth describes the origin of Yamantaka: An ascetic vowed to meditate for fifty years, after which he would achieve spiritual liberation (*nirvana*). Just one day before the end of his fifty years of austerities, robbers entered his cave with a stolen bull. As they decapitated the beast, one of the thieves suddenly saw the ascetic and realized that their crime had been witnessed. Although the ascetic explained his plight and begged them to spare his life, they showed him no mercy and ruthlessly removed his head as well. His lifeless body miraculously assumed Yama's powerful form; he placed the recently slaughtered bull's head on his shoulders, and his wrath knew no bounds. He killed the two thieves and drank their blood from cups made of their own skulls. It was only after the intervention of Manjushri in his form as Yamantaka that Yama's wrathful rampage was temporarily subdued. As in much of Esoteric Buddhist iconography, this deity, although apparently demonic and wrathful, is merely the manifestation necessarily assumed in order to achieve a compassionate goal.

And as with all wrathful Buddhist images, Yamantaka's fury could be harnessed for good. In Tibet, the famed theologian Tsong Khapa (1357–1419)



44: Detail



designated Yamantaka as the protector of the Gelukpa order. He is sometimes associated with practices related to the "pacification of afflictions." In this context, Yamantaka brings relief to those suffering from poverty, illness, or "assaults by demons."[3] In many works, Yamantaka appears as part of the mandala's "protective sphere" (*rakshachakra*).[4]

Murals in the upper story at Gyantse (ca. 1425) include a Vajrabhairava mandala whose central figure resembles the main figure here.[5] This painting's iconography is also similar to that in a painting in the Musée Guimet, Paris, and to another in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.[6] Both date to about the fifteenth century, slightly later than the work under consideration. In style, this work compares closely with two others in the exhibition: the Raktayamari (cat. no. 40), dating to about the early fourteenth century, and the Chakrasamvara (cat. no. 43), dating to about 1400. The extravagant, playful treatment of the lotus petals and the emphatically lobed tips of Mahavajrabhairava's flaming halo may be indications of a date later than that of the Raktayamari, and therefore sometime during the second half of the fourteenth century. The presence of Sakya-order monks (with long-tailed red peaked caps) in the painting's lineage suggests that it was commissioned for one of the Sakya communities in central Tibet. JCS

1 Linrothe 1999, p. 175.
2 Béguin and Colinart 1995, p. 297.
3 Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, p. 280.
4 Mallmann 1964, pp. 111–16.
5 Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 465, 469–70, pl. 182.
6 Published in Béguin and Colinart 1995, pp. 297–98; and Pal 1983, p. 146, and New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 282–83, respectively.

45. Mandala of Vajradhatu

A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet, ca. late 14th century
Distemper on cloth
102.2 x 77.5 cm (40¼ x 30½ in.)
The Kronos Collections

Vairochana in his four-faced, eight-armed form presides over this mandala of Vajradhatu (the Diamond Realm), which is almost certainly based on the *Sarva Tathagata Tattva Samgraha Tantra* (STTS), a text translated into Tibetan by Rinchen Sangpo (958–1055). Lokesh Chandra, who has studied the twenty-four mandalas described in the STTS, notes that the Vajradhatu was one of the earliest mandalas to appear in Tibet during the Chidar (the Later Diffusion); some of its mandalas appeared in the main



45: Detail



temple at Tabo (dated ca. 996–1042).[1] The iconographically similar Diamond World mandalas, commonly seen in Esoteric Japanese Buddhism, also stem from the STTS, which was translated into Japanese by Amoghavajra (705–774).[2]

This mandala is meant to convey Vairochana's *sambhogakaya* (Body of Perfect Rapture), said to be characterized by radiance and emptiness (*shunyata*), a state directly perceptible only to advanced tenth-level bodhisattvas.[3] Nine encircled deities are arranged in three registers within the mandala's primary court (*kutagara*). In the center is Vairochana, one pair of hands at his chest held in a gesture of adoration (*anjali mudra*), another upward-turned pair held in his lap in meditative gesture (*dhyana mudra*).[4] Other hands hold the bow and arrow, a rosary, and a wheel. Surrounding Vairochana and placed at the cardinal points of the compass are four symbols of the "families" (*kula*) associated with the four transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas): the ritual thunderbolt (*vajra*, Akshobhya), the gem (*ratna*, Ratnasambhava), the lotus (*padma*, Amitabha), and the crossed *vajra* (*vishvavajra*, Amoghasiddhi).

The four Tathagatas are themselves at the centers of the four adjacent circles: Akshobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitabha in the west, and Amoghasiddhi in the north. Each is surrounded by four attendants.[5] In four circles marking the intermediate points of the compass are four goddesses associated with offerings made to the mandala's central deity: Vajramala (southwest; garland), Vajragita (northwest; song), Vajranrtya (northeast; dance), and Vajralasya (southeast; amorous dance). Four further offering goddesses appear at the corners of the second, larger court: Vajrapuspa (southwest; flower), Vajradipa (northwest; lamp), Vajragandha (northeast; perfume), and Vajradhupa (southeast; incense). Each quadrant contains two hundred and fifty bodhisattvas who are associated with the Tathagata presiding over each of the four cardinal directions.

Outside the sacred circle of the central mandala, at the four corners of the painting, are four further circles of deities. In the top register is a series of celestial and historical figures associated with the teachings of the Vajradhatu mandala. The first Tibetan in the series (the sixth figure from the left) may be Rinchen Sangpo,[6] noted above as the Tibetan translator of the STTS. Without identifying inscriptions, the other historical figures cannot be named with certainty. The bottom register includes a Tibetan monk seated before implements and objects of ritual worship, and sixteen protector deities.

It is difficult to imagine how the aesthetic vision that inspired this work—with its vibrant, beautifully juxtaposed colors; its masterfully controlled, wire-thin line; and its lithe, luminous figures—could be more perfectly rendered. The same symmetry that informs most of the works in this catalogue appears here, but it is especially remarkable because of the composition's enormous complexity. Large numbers of figures, architectural elements, and ritual implements are meticulously arranged to form a complex, symmetrical tableau. Even the scrollwork follows perfectly regular rhythms and helps to impart this beautiful vision of a vast harmonious realm.

This painting can be dated to the late fourteenth century when compared with firmly dated fifteenth-century mandalas, such as the three paintings in the Vajravali series, dated about 1429–56 in this catalogue (cat. no. 47). Although this work compares closely with the Vajravali series mandalas, it differs from them chiefly in its more fluidly drawn scrollwork and more subtly graded palette. Here, foliate scrolls are wider; so too, the rich foliage connecting the upper throne backs of figures in the top and bottom registers is more fluidly presented, the forms fuller and less given to angular patterns. Despite these distinctions, the line, figural proportions, and many architectural elements in this work are so close to the style of the Vajravali series (executed by Newari artists; see cat. no. 47, below), that, most likely, Newari artists also painted this work, either for Ngor or another religious site in central Tibet, toward the end of the fourteenth century. JCS

1 Tucci, *Spiti and Kunavar*, 1988, p. xiii; on the dating of Tabo, see Pritzker 1989 and Klimburg-Salter 1994.
2 New York 1997, pp. 29–30, 116–17.
3 In traditional Indian theology, the distinction between a tenth-*bhumi* bodhisattva and a Buddha is slight. In the *Prajnaparamita* literature, including the *Suramgamasamadhi Sutra* and the *Mahavastu*, there are descriptions of the ten stages (*bhumi*) through which a bodhisattva progresses in his or her career, the last stage being the tenth *bhumi*. Tenth-*bhumi* bodhisattvas have already perfected the *paramitas* (virtues such as patience and charity) and have mastered the ten powers of the Tathagata. According to the literature, they are tied to the phenomenal world only by their great compassion for sentient beings. See LaMotte 1960.
4 For identification of this deity, see Chandra and Raghu Vira 1991, no. 1000, p. 372.
5 Their names are cited in Lokesh Chandra's introduction to Tucci, *Spiti and Kunavar*, 1988, p. xix.
6 Personal correspondence from David Jackson, January 5, 1997.

46. Mandala of Jnanadakini

A Nepalese artist
Tibet (a Sakya monastery), late 14th century
Distemper on cloth
84.5 x 73.3 cm (33¼ x 28⅞ in.)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Lita Annenberg Hazen Charitable Trust Gift, 1987 (1987.16)



The format of this mandala is typical: a palace with four gates, each flanked by *makaras* disgorging foliate arcs, which are, metaphorically, the ends of *vajras* (thunderbolt scepters). If the shafts of the *vajras* were shown, they would cross at the center of the palace behind the main deity and indicate the purified realm that she inhabits. *Jnana* means wisdom, and Jnanadakini is the feminine aspect of Jnanadaka, a fierce manifestation of the Buddha Vajrasattva, who presides over the five Tathagatas (see cat. no. 10). Jnanadakini has three faces and six arms, and she is surrounded by eight assistants and by the four guardians who sit within the portals of the palace.[1] The encircling realms of lotus, *vajra*, and fire are set within a ring containing the eight great cremation grounds of India. The inclusion of this last band is proscribed when horrific deities are portrayed, because, as practitioners were often advised, it was most efficacious to meditate on them in taboo places, such as these cremation grounds. Devotees are pictured there in the midst of rituals and meditations. The quadrants of the outer circle are filled with scrolling vines inhabited by dancing dakinis, fierce goddesses associated with the void, and by lamas. The upper register contains a series of figures: the hierarch Sakya Pandita is at the center; a Kagyu lineage is to the left and a Kadampa lineage to the right. At the extreme left of the bottom register, a monk dressed in Tibetan robes sits before an offering table. To the monk's left are a series of wealth-bestowing and protective deities and a group of dakinis.

This painting is from a set of mandalas previously associated with Ngor monastery and initially dated to the early sixteenth century.[2] Now it is recognized that the series was probably created in the late fourteenth century, before Ngor was founded;[3] nevertheless, a Sakya provenance is still likely. All these mandalas focus on a single deity and are similar in composition to ours; none shows the kind of composite imagery that is encountered in the later Vajravali series dating to about 1429–56 (see cat. no. 47). Although the format of the Jnanadakini painting can be traced to early prototypes from Nepal or Tibet, the style is so purely Nepalese that, most probably, the work was created by a painter from Nepal.[4] The almost obsessive rendering of detail is typical, as are the somewhat squat figures with round heads and delicate, pinched features. The backgrounds seen in the various tiers of the palaces are enlivened by an overall design of scrolling peonies whose earliest survival is seen in the Virupa *thanka* (cat. no. 35).

The gradation of tones within a single color, found in paintings commissioned by Tibetans from Nepalese artists (and, to lesser extent, in the Indian-inspired *thankas*), is prominent here. Initially, such shading was used only to give a subtle sense of emphasis or transition at the intersections of color fields (see cat. no. 36). Thus, the darkened outer edges of the blue and red quadrants of the central room of the palace seem to float behind the central circle, whereas the adjacent white and yellow areas, whose opaque colors have not been subjected to this technique, are relatively two-dimensional.[5] The same use of shading occurs conspicuously in the lotus and fire areas. A somewhat more Western sense of modeling is found in some elements—such as the *makara* heads—in which the highlights of forms gradually move toward more opaque or lighter tones. SMK

1 Mallmann 1986, pp. 201–2.
2 See Burawoy 1978; Pal (in Pal 1984, nos. 29–31) dated two paintings from this set to the fifteenth century.
3 David Jackson (in a personal communication) dates them to about 1375, and this seems to agree with our stylistic analysis.
4 See cat. no. 2, and New York 1997 no. 13.
5 Either of the latter areas could have been darkened with black, but gray and green would have resulted, modulating the colors to another tonal range.

47. Three Paintings from the Vajravali Series

a. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Ngor monastery), ca. 1429–56
Distemper on cloth
88.5 x 74.5 cm (34⅞ x 29⅜ in.)
Private collection

b. Kalachakra Mandala
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Ngor monastery), ca. 1429–56
Distemper on cloth
90.5 x 75.5 cm (35⅝ x 29¾ in.)
Michael Henss Collection

c. Four Mandalas
A Nepalese artist
Central Tibet (Ngor monastery), ca. 1429–56
Distemper on cloth
91.4 x 73.7 cm (36 x 29 in.)
Zimmerman Family Collection

These three works are from a series of paintings that illustrate mandalas from the *Vajravali* (Diamond Garland) text. They were commissioned by the founder of Ngor monastery, Ngorchen Kunga Sangpo (1382–1456). Like others in the series, the paintings bear identical Tibetan inscriptions along the lower edge, citing one of Kunga Sangpo's teachers, Lama Sazang Phakpa (d. ca. 1380).[1] An inscription at the top of each painting specifies its number in the *Vajravali* series: the Mandala of the Six Chakravartins is the eighth; the Kalachakra Mandala is the eleventh; and the Four Mandalas is the seventh.[2] The first, fifth, thirteenth, and fourteenth paintings are also known to have survived.[3]

The Tibetologist David Jackson has recently shown that this series was commissioned by Ngorchen Kunga Sangpo sometime between 1429, the year he founded Ngor monastery, and 1456, the year of his death. Citing a history of Ngor monastery written in 1688 by the twenty-fifth abbot of Ngor, Sangye Phuntsok (1649–1705), Jackson recounts that "[t]o fulfill the wishes of his deceased teacher [Sazang Phakpa], [Kunga Sangpo] commissioned from Newari artists the painting of [a] complete set of mandalas of the Vajravali cycle, together with three additional mandalas from the Kriyasamuccaya collection."[4] Sangye Phuntsok's history includes a remarkable—if somewhat apocryphal—account of the Kathmandu Valley artists who painted the series. Without prior arrangement, six Newari painters, including Wang-gu-li and his brother, are said to have arrived at Ngor soon after Kunga Sangpo decided to commission the *Vajravali* mandalas. Despite lucrative offers en route, the artists are said to have been drawn to the remote hermitage of Ngor "as if summoned . . . by the power of the lama's [Kunga Sangpo's] meditation."[5] The Newari painter Akhe Radza is said to have remarked that all six artists wanted to present themselves to Kunga Sangpo, whom they referred to as "the son [that is, the spiritual descendant] of Lama Phakpa"—an allusion to the Sakya hierarch who, nearly two hundred years before, had been instrumental in the meteoric rise to fame of the superbly talented Newari artist Aniko (1244–1306) (see above, pp. 22, 41). Jackson notes that the abbots of Ngor did not permit its temple walls to be adorned with Esoteric iconography;[6] this may account for the large number of Esoteric *thankas* commissioned for the sanctuary. When not required or no longer appropriate, a *thanka* could be rolled up and placed in storage. Sangye Phuntsok's biography describes another set of paintings commissioned by Kunga Sangpo that were "hung and displayed every other year at the time of the [Hevajra] Path Consecration, in alternation with the set of golden thangkas (*gser thang*) . . . it was forbidden to remove these paintings from their place of keeping in [a chapel] at Ngor—infractions against this prohibition would be punished by the Dharmapalas!"[7] The excellent condition of these three *Vajravali* paintings may be the result of similarly infrequent use.

The paintings demonstrate an extraordinary range of motifs and architectural designs. The designs of the gates of the temple or palace courts (*kutagara*) differ on all three paintings, as do the arches over seated or standing figures in the top and bottom registers; different decorative patterns adorn the side borders of the Mandala of the Six Chakravartins and the Four

Mandalas paintings; those of the Kalachakra Mandala are unadorned. The scrollwork assumes many patterns and appears in many sizes, demonstrating aesthetic idiosyncrasies; the Kalachakra scrollwork is rendered with breathtaking virtuosity. It would be worthwhile to compare all the surviving paintings from the series in order to see whether one could distinguish individual artists' hands. As Robert Bruce-Gardner notes, idiosyncratic brushstrokes can sometimes be distinguished in X-ray photographs; such observations can contribute to our understanding of how these paintings were made.

It is not altogether clear how the paintings relate to the *Vajravali* text from which they are drawn. The *Vajravali* was compiled by the Indian scholar Abhayakaragupta of Vikramashila monastery in eastern India, a contemporary of King Ramapala (ca. 1084–1130) and author of other influential texts, including the *Nishpannayogavali* (The Garland of Perfection Yogas). The *Vajravali* contains twenty-six chapters, each of which describes one or more mandalas; the entire text describes forty-two mandalas.[8]

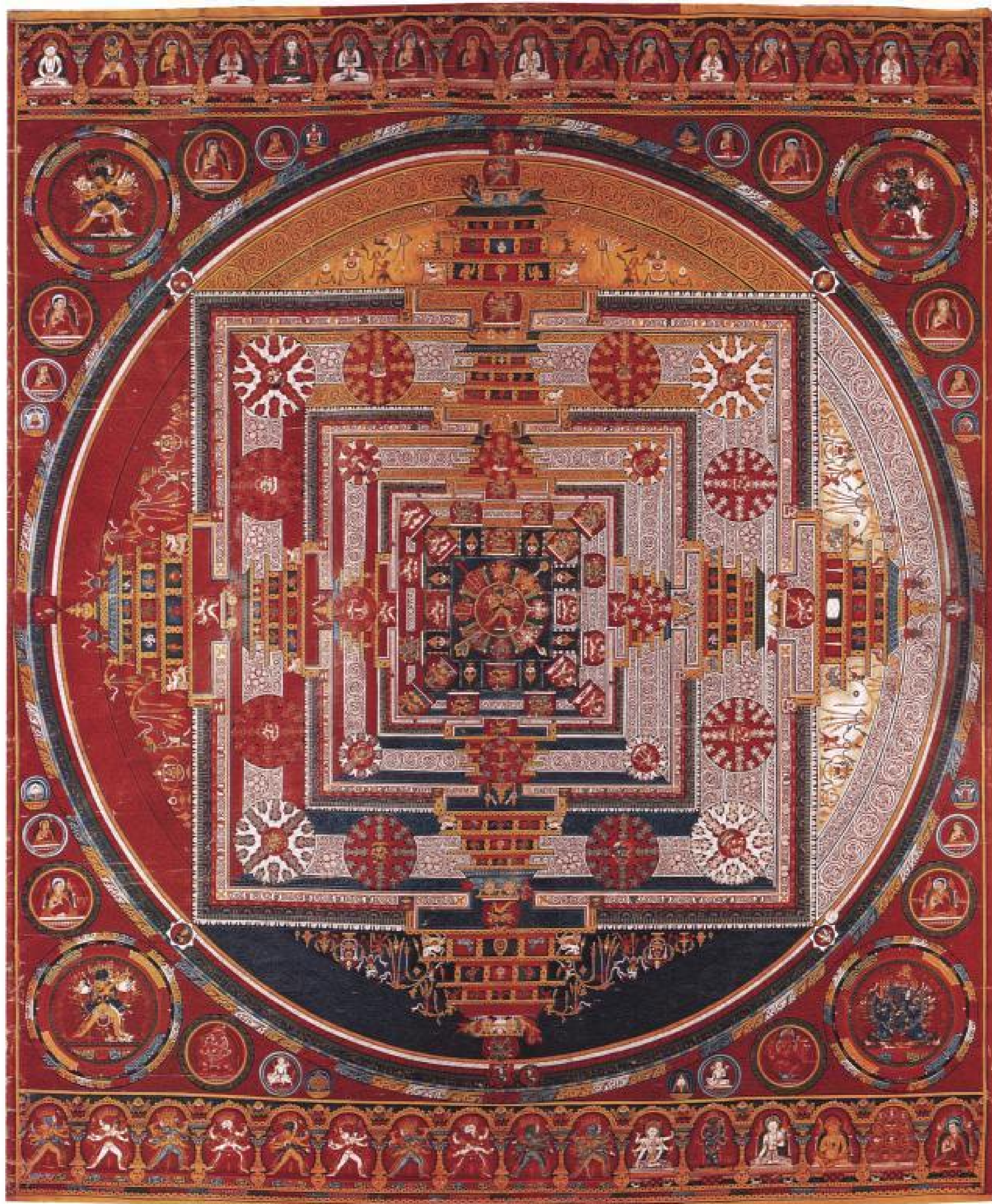
The sequence of the paintings—as indicated by the numerals in the inscriptions cited above—differs from that in the *Vajravali* text. For example, the Mandala of the Six Chakravartins is the eighth in the series, but it appears in the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Vajravali*; the Kalachakra Mandala is the eleventh in the series, but it appears in the last, the twenty-sixth, chapter of the *Vajravali*; and the Four Mandalas is said to be the seventh in the series, but its iconography does not precisely correspond to any of the mandalas in the *Vajravali*.[9] In their discussion of another Four Mandalas painting in this series, Marilyn Rhie and Robert Thurman note that only one of the four mandalas is from the *Vajravali* text; the other three "are included in [the] painting since they are associated with the granting of initiation in the Vajravali set of visualizations."[10] It is noteworthy that the Tibetan historian Go Lotsawa (1392–1481) mentioned that in his day, the *Vajravali* had been translated into Tibetan so many times that many versions of the text were known to exist.[11]

No. 47a illustrates the Six Chakravartins (Enlightened Universal Rulers) Mandala. In this context, the chakravartins are understood to be manifestations of the Tathagatas, or Celestial Buddhas, identified in the *Vajravali* as: Jnanadaka (a manifestation of Vajrasattva), Buddhadaka (Vairochana), Ratnadaka (Ratnasambhava), Padmadaka (Amitabha), Vajradaka (Akshobhya), and Vishvadaka (Amoghasiddhi).[12] Each chakravartin, together with his consort and members of his immediate entourage, is positioned within a temple or palace court; the six courts are arranged within a larger *kutagara* with four elaborate gates marking the cardinal points of the compass. Outside the main *kutagara* are other circles of deities and auspicious symbols, all identified by inscription, as are the deities in the top and bottom registers. These identifying inscriptions are curious—since none of the deities in the main sanctuary is inscribed—but the inscriptions may have served a necessary didactic purpose, as the inscribed figures are not found in the *Vajravali* description of this mandala.[13] The top register includes guardians of the four cardinal and intermediate points of the compass, four door guardians (*dvarapalas*), and Samvaribhadrava, as well as Raktayamari and two guardians of the southern and eastern directions. The bottom register presents sixteen goddesses "who embody awareness" (*rig ma bcu drug*), consorts to the sixteen deities in the top register. These goddesses bear offerings in the form of dance, music, flower garlands, and the like, which they present to the main deities of the mandala.

No. 47b illustrates the Kalachakra (the Wheel of Time) Mandala, one of the most complex mandalas in Tibetan art.[14] It is meant to include seven hundred and twenty-two deities arranged within three concentric courts, each marked by four elaborate gates. At its center is the four-faced, twenty-two-armed Kalachakra, embracing his consort, Vishvamata. They are surrounded by eight multiarmed deities standing on lotus petals.[15] In two concentric square inner chambers are two further groups of multiarmed male and female figures in sexual embrace. The gates are guarded by a host of deities. The second court houses four circles of deities, placed at the intermediate points of the compass. Each features a standing bodhisattva who embraces a consort; surrounding each couple is an eight-petal lotus that supports eight additional deities. All four three-tier gates bear deities. The third court houses twelve circles that are meant to represent the twelve months of the year; each circle includes twenty-eight deities, signifying days of a month. The gates marking this enclosure are the grandest of the mandala, teeming with deities and surmounted by a *makara* and other beasts who support a wheeled cart that contains deities in sexual embrace (see detail). In the top register are historical and divine figures—including Shakyamuni Buddha—who have studied, practiced, and perpetuated the teachings of Kalachakra both in India and in Tibet. The three courts of the Kalachakra Mandala are said to correspond to a body, speech, and mind that are purified by enlightenment; but it must be said that the immensely rich symbolism of this complex iconographic program requires considerable further study.[16] Kunga Sangpo, who commissioned this series of paintings, appears in the far right corner, seated before a series of ritual offerings and imple-



47a



47b



47b: Detail



47c

ments connected by a scrolling vine and identified by inscription. This, the last mandala in the *Vajravali* text, was apparently considered the logical place in which to depict the series' commissioner.[17]

No. 47c illustrates Four Mandalas enclosed by scenes of cremation grounds (*shmashanas*). Three of the mandalas depict iconography related to Vajravarahi or Nairatmya; that in the bottom right corner depicts a form of Hevajra, as already noted by Pratapaditya Pal.[18] The cremation grounds are especially noteworthy, as are the figures of the Sakya hierarch Drakpa Gyeltsen (1147–1216) and the noted Tantric scholar Sherab Gyeltsen (d. 1361) in the medallion at the center of the painting.

These three *Vajravali* paintings and indeed all the surviving works from this series demonstrate extraordinary artistic virtuosity. Even without recourse to the symbolic significance and ritual practices associated with these mandalas (associations that were of fundamental importance to practitioners at Ngor monastery), the paintings are dazzling displays, with their vivid juxtapositions of colors, their delightful and surprising arrangements of geometric forms, and their precise details. Both this series of paintings and, most probably, the Kunga Nyingpo portrait (cat. no. 51) were commissioned by Ngor founder Kunga Sangpo, who clearly served as a discerning artistic patron for Ngor monastery during its first decades. JCS

1 *dpal ldan bla ma dam pa sa bzang 'phags pa'i thugs kyi dgongs pa yongs su rdzogs par gyur cig//*. "May the heart's intent of the holy glorious Lama Sazang Phakpa be fulfilled."
2 *rdo rje phreng ba'i ras bris [brgyad/bcu gcig/bdun] pa'o//*. "This is the eighth/eleventh/seventh painting of the Vajravali [text]."
3 The others are published in Béguin 1990, pp. 70–72 (no. 1); New York 1997, pp. 86–87 (no. 5); New York 1997, p. 88 (no. 13); and New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 226–29 (no. 14). Three works from another series of paintings that depicts the Vajravali mandalas have also been recently published. See Pal 1995, pp. 59, 63; New York 1997, pp. 90–91; Amsterdam 1997, pp. 30–31. They are extremely close in style to the three paintings presented here, though they do not bear the inscriptions (given later in this entry) that help to identify the donor, the textual source for the iconography, and the date of this particular group of paintings. Perhaps future research will uncover historical connections between these two series.
4 Jackson 1996, p. 78.
5 Ibid., p. 82.
6 Ibid., p. 77.
7 Cited in Jackson 1996, p. 78.
8 Raghu Vira and Chandra 1995, p. 12.
9 See Raghu Vira and Chandra 1995.
10 New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, p. 227.
11 Roerich 1979, pp. 1046–48.
12 For the names of these deities, see Raghu Vira and Chandra 1995, pp. 80–82.
13 Ibid.
14 Michael Henss notes that the painting has been in Switzerland since 1967.
15 For the names of these and some of the other deities in this mandala, see Mallmann 1975, pp. 69–73.
16 See Brauen 1997.
17 He is identified by an inscription written in gold Tibetan script. Kunga Sangpo is a Tibetan translation of the Indian Sanskrit name Anandabhadra, and it is in this form that the Ngor founder's name appears in the inscription: *A nanta bha tra*. Michael Henss has a large and very beautiful portrait *thanka* of Kunga Sangpo in his collection.
18 New York, *Himalayas*, 1991, pp. 150–52.

48. Standing Mahakala

Central Tibet (a Sakya monastery), first half of the 15th century
Distemper on cloth
97.2 x 67.9 cm (38¼ x 26¾ in.)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection (1994.148.638)

In this painting, the blue-skinned Mahakala is shown in his two-armed form in a traditional manner: standing on a corpse, holding a skull cup (*kapala*) and chopper (*kartrika*) and wearing a necklace and a tiara of skulls. He is flanked by Palden Lhamo and another Mahakala. Above them are two horrific deities, a male to the left and a female to the right, who also wear tiger skins and have a third eye. Above the aureoles of the upper deities are scenes depicting some of the eight cremation grounds of India, which were thought to be auspicious places for meditating on horrific deities. Included in these vignettes are monks, mahasiddhas, and guardians of the directions. At the top of the painting is a lineage, and within the throne base, a series of auspicious deities flanking a depiction of Indra being worshiped as he sits on his elephant.

Although the painting is in the Nepalese style, several elements seem to indicate that it might have been painted by a Tibetan artist. The distinction can be seen not only in the main images, which lack the grace and subtle animation of Nepalese workmanship, but also, equally clearly, in the details that



exhibit the technical proficiency of the artist. A comparison of the hands and feet of this image with those of the earlier Mahakala (cat. no. 38) reveals these to be comparatively stiff. A similar lack of harmony can be seen in the posture of some of the figures in the throne base and the proportions of the monks in the upper register. The torsos of many of the figures are much more elongated than is the typical squat Nepalese body, although these are like some of the figures in the Vajravali series (cat. no. 47), which we know to have been painted by Nepalese artists. Some of the details also lack the customary élan of the Nepalese hand. For example, the treatment of the interiors of the lotus petals is clumsy; the artist had difficulty rendering the foliate wavelike design while maintaining the proper shape of the petal. Lastly, the *thanka* is uncharacteristically large. Despite these shortcomings, the image is extremely powerful and arresting. SMK

49. Dancing Ganapati

Central Tibet, ca. mid-15th century
Distemper on linen
68 x 59 cm (26¾ x 23¼ in.)
Private collection

Ganapati, the central figure in this superb painting, is associated with good fortune, auspicious beginnings, and the successful overcoming of obstacles. "Ganapati" is the Buddhist name for the Hindu elephant-god, Ganesha. Here, he dwells in a mountain jungle, suggested by the presence of multicolored cubes and other geometric shapes (typically Nepalese motifs for rendering mountains) behind the arch, interspersed with trees and monkeys, tigers, birds, and lions. Indeed, the entire structure—Ganapati, the arch, and the mountains behind—rests on multicolored cubes, also clearly intended to suggest a mountain setting.

The twelve-armed deity dances on top of a lotus platform in front of a supine animal spitting jewels—probably Ganapati's vehicle, the rat. In his primary hands he holds a thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*) and a skull cup (*kapala*); his other hands hold (clockwise from his upper left): pestle, shield and ceremonial staff (*khatvanga*) with banner, skull cup, ceremonial staff, bow, arrow, goad, sword, dagger with peacock-feather hilt, and ax. He is lavishly bejeweled with crown, upper armlets, bracelets, finger rings and toe rings, anklets, many strands of necklaces, and the jewels on his trunk. He also wears a scarf, arranged in lappets on his shoulders; and a beautifully patterned skirt (dhoti), secured below his ponderous belly, covers his thighs.

Ganapati appears within a five-lobe arch supported by two elaborate pillars. The arch itself is surmounted by rich golden foliage that is emerging from the tails of two flanking *makaras* (mythological crocodilian creatures). Within this foliage, other animals also appear, including geese (*hamsas*) and snake gods (*nagas*). Garuda, half-man, half-bird, appears at the summit of the arch. The elephantine god is offered a bowl of sweets by a golden monkey, who poses beseechingly just below Ganapati's right knee. Above, two other monkeys crouch near the elephant god; the largest bears two flower buds. A four-armed monkey at Ganapati's left proffers an offering cup in his central pair of hands; he holds two rather curious additional offerings in his other hands: a vegetal stem surmounted by an erect phallus and a bowl of sweets surmounted by a vulva.[1] Two deities on multicolored clouds bearing garlands (vidyadharas) flank Ganapati's crown. In the upper left corner the Indian Yogic adept (mahasiddha) Virupa is offered a skull-cup beverage by a green-complexioned goddess (see cat. no. 35), and in the upper right corner, a form of Mahakala appears.

Of considerable interest is the man seated adjacent to the lotus platform at the lower right. He is dressed as a wealthy layman; his dark hair is gathered in long tresses, and he wears boots and a dark green cloak over an orange robe that is cinched at the waist with a dark sash. He is adorned with earrings of gold and turquoise, a ring, and a large turquoise-studded amulet case; a sheathed sword is tucked inside his belt. He holds a skull cup in his right hand and offers a variation of the gesture associated with religious discourse (*vitarka mudra*) with his left. Behind him, visible just above his right shoulder, is a table set with ritual implements, normally associated with the painting's consecrating monk. Although not specifically identified, an inscription on the back of the painting does shed light on the identity of this wealthy layman.

In one of the most elaborate *thanka* inscriptions known, the entire reverse of the painting is covered with writing. Thirty-two lines of black ornamental Sanskrit script (*ranjana*) record mantras associated with Ganapati. Beneath each line is a Tibetan phonetic transliteration of the Sanskrit mantras, written in Tibetan cursive (*umey*) script. The mantra *om ah hum* is written in red *ranjana* script, marking the forehead, throat, and heart centers of each deity portrayed on the obverse. Many major deities have longer mantras arranged in the form of portable shrines, inset into the thirty-two lines of black *ranjana* script mentioned above.

Three lines composed in Tibetan and written in black printed (*uchen*) script appear at the bottom of the painting. They may be translated as follows:

Homage to the resplendent body, azure blue in color,
Blazing forth from the emanations of the minds of the Conquerors of the Three Times!
Homage to the Vajra-holding Lord of Secrets [Vajrapani],
Whose loud voice, "Hum Phat!" subdues the hosts of demons!
I bow to the feet of Ganapati,
The elephant-faced one, radiant as a ruby,
In whom all enlightened activities are subsumed without exception,
Lord of the Gana Host, holding the treasure of inexhaustible wealth!

This Ganapati, precious meditational deity, was commissioned
Out of respect for the Buddhist teaching by Peljor Sangpo,
Who has the most fervent faith, endowed with "glorious attributes" (*dpal 'byor*)
And an "excellent" (*bzang po*) intelligence.

Thus [may it be] a treasure, containing all that is desired in this existence!
May all [beings] traverse the series of ten [bodhisattva] levels,
And manifest the indestructible reality,
The mastery of the four Buddha bodies![2]

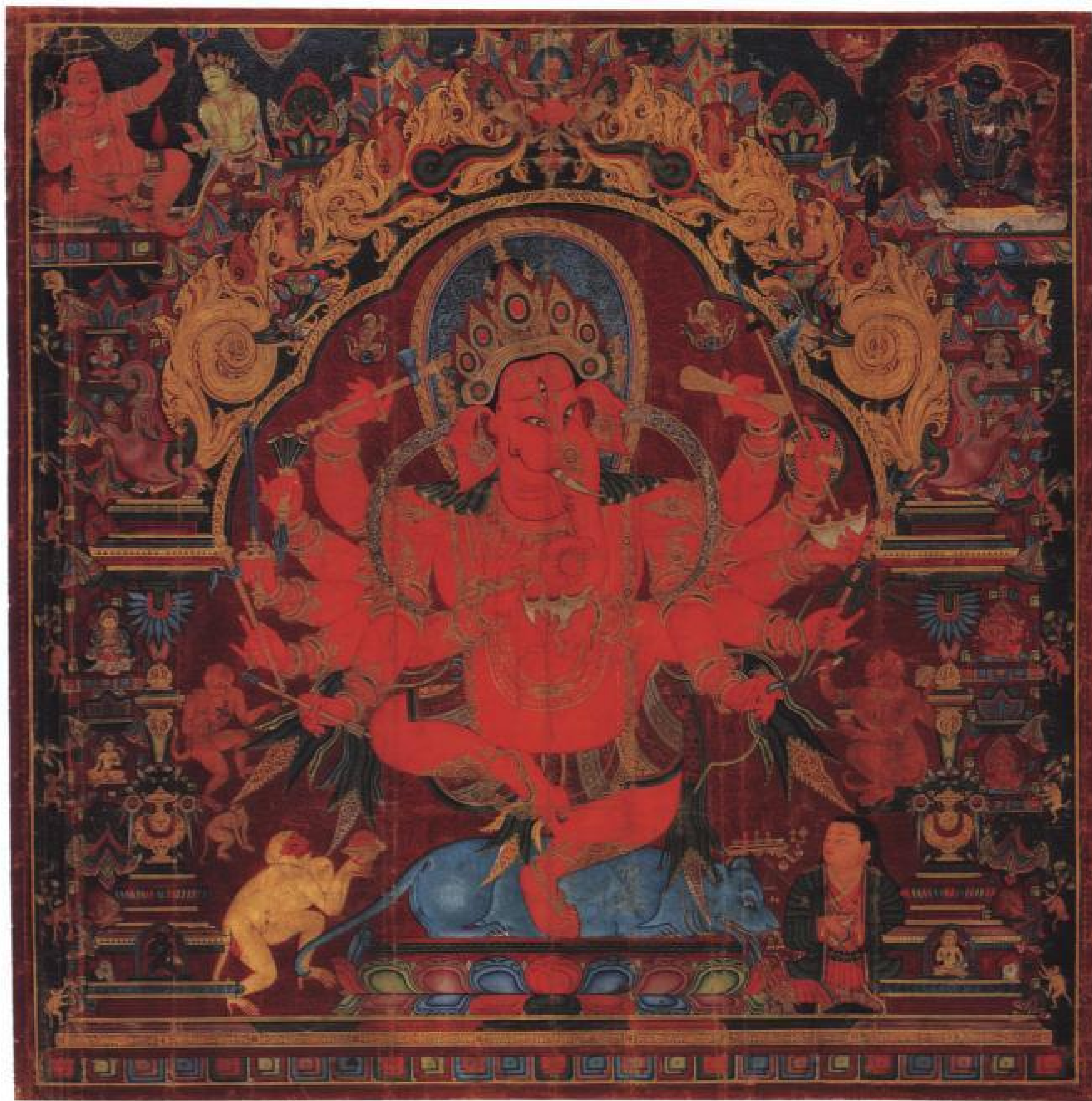
The identity of Peljor Sangpo is not entirely certain. However, a likely candidate is Peljor Sangpo of the Chongye (*'phyong rgyas*) clan, who was named master of ceremonies (*gsol dpon*) and then general (*dmag dpon*) under the ruler Sonam Drakpa (1359–1408) and later was appointed district magistrate and revenue officer (*rdzong dpon*) at Shigatse (formerly known as *bsam 'grub rtse*) under Sonam Drakpa's successor, Drakpa Gyeltsen (1374–1432).[3] The post of magistrate in Shigatse was a lucrative one, since it was an important stronghold along the trade route between south central Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley. Drakpa Gyeltsen also later appointed Peljor Sangpo commander-in-chief.[4]

Drakpa Gyeltsen was a member of the powerful Phakmo Drupa family (not to be confused with the Kagyu hierarch of this name), descendant of Changchub Gyeltsen, who had wrested power from the Sakyapas and ruled over the Mongol-created thirteen districts of Tibet (see p. 22). Drakpa Gyeltsen was an extremely popular ruler who had copies of the Kanjur in gold letters deposited in the thirteen main fortresses of his kingdom.[5] He was both an ordained monk and a prince (*chos rgyal*), and he fully exercised his political powers. He was admired for his able civil administration, under which Tibetans enjoyed much peace and prosperity, and he managed good relations with China. Although a monk, he resided in the capital at Neudong (*sneu gdong*), while his younger brothers resided at Tsethang (*rtse thang*) and Thel (*'thel*) monasteries.[6]

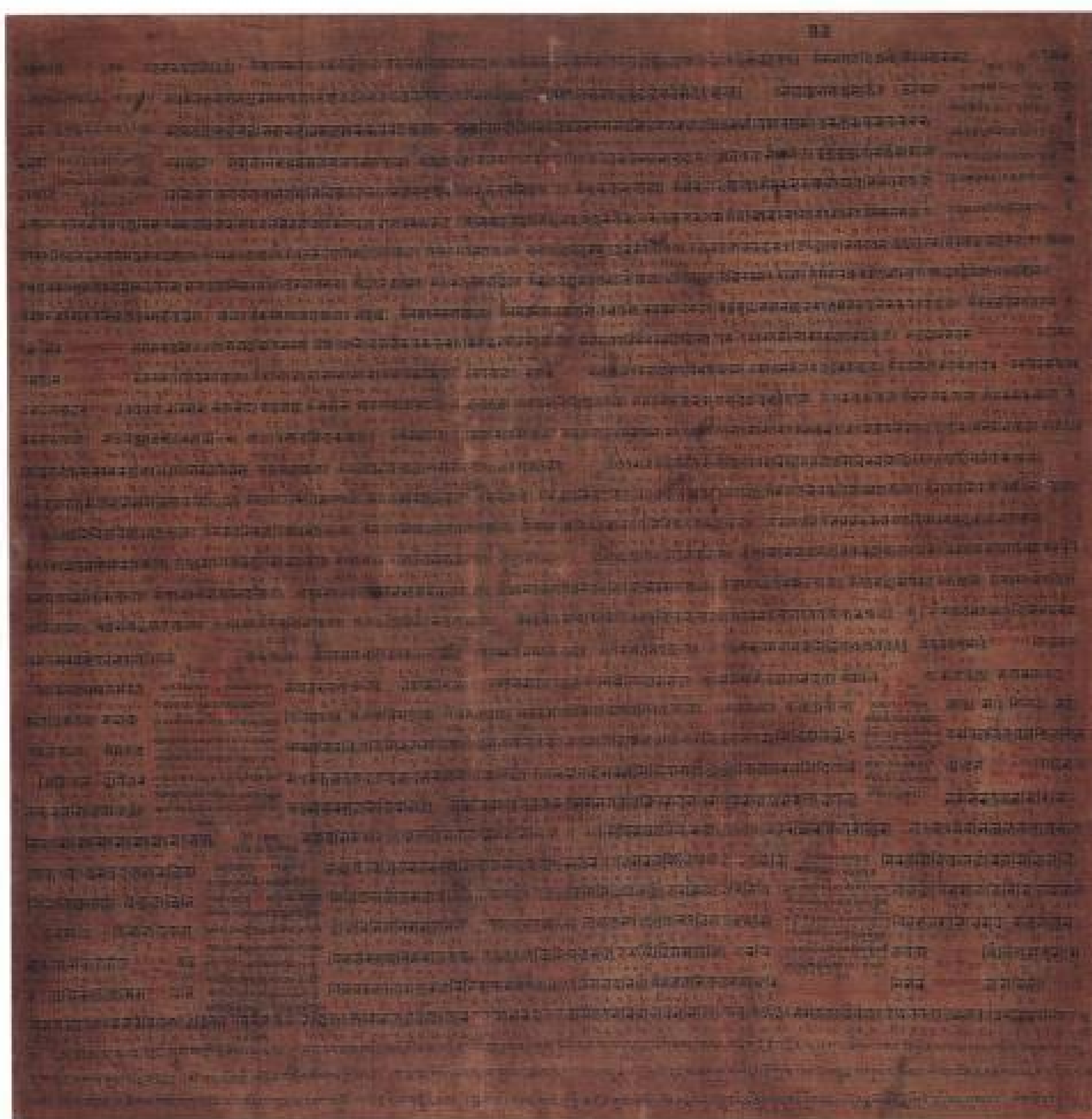
Drakpa Gyeltsen appointed members of other clans to important posts, Peljor Sangpo of the Chongye clan being just one example. The Fifth Dalai Lama's *Chronicles* described court life under Drakpa Gyeltsen, which Peljor Sangpo would have enjoyed: "The circle of his retinue was extremely numerous and consisted in men [versed] in civil and religious affairs, well-born, having virtue and power. He established the order of ornaments and dresses corresponding to the office they occupied and above all he distributed the special ornaments, after having founded the festival of the first day of the new year, called 'time of precious ornaments,' and ordered, to give lustre to men's ears, the use of earrings wrought with gems, to be worn always. . . ."[7]

Peljor Sangpo remained active in Tibetan political and religious life after the death of Drakpa Gyeltsen. The *Chronicles* of the Fifth Dalai Lama state that Peljor Sangpo of the Chongye clan was the chief patron of Gedun Drup (1391–1474, posthumously named the First Dalai Lama), at the time that the latter was founding Tashilungpo monastery in 1447.[8] Tucci writes: ". . . the [Chongye] family had shown at an early date its sympathies with Tsong Khapa's reform. . . . [Peljor Sangpo] was a pupil of Gedun Drup and so completely conquered by the new doctrine, that he began to protect it to the point of becoming one of the main contributors to the construction of Tashilungpo."[9]

Gedun Drup was a leading disciple of the famous reformer-theologian Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) and became a renowned Buddhist scholar in his own right. Having founded Tashilungpo monastery in Shigatse, Gedun Drup became its first abbot. The Fifth Dalai Lama chronicles Peljor Sangpo's role as chief patron of Gedun Drup, raising the question of whether this painting of Ganapati might have been



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49: Reverse

commissioned by Peljor Sangpo for Gedun Drup. As a portrayal of Ganapati, destroyer of obstacles, it would have been an appropriate image with which to begin a building project such as the founding of Tashilungpo monastery, although this assertion must be regarded as speculative until substantiated by additional evidence.

One further historical association will be drawn here, although links with this painting are as yet purely speculative. The Tibetan artist Menla Dondrub (fl. 1450s–1470s), revered as a great painter in his own day and founder of a school of painting known as the Menri, was closely associated with the First Dalai Lama, who offered him patronage and commissioned him to paint murals at Tashilungpo in 1458 and 1464.[10] David Jackson cites Menla Dondrub's description of himself as "the painter (*ri mo mkhan*) . . . who had mastered all the painting styles . . . from such countries as India, China, Nepal and Tibet, and who had also mastered [Sanskrit?] grammar, poetics, two Indian scripts and all Tibetan scripts. . . ."[11]

Although the identity of the artist is unknown, this magnificent work was clearly produced by a great master. And while its style resembles that of paintings either known to have been commissioned from Newari artists for Tibetans (see cat. no. 47) or thought to have been painted by Newari artists (cat. nos. 35, 36), one must remember that by the turn of the fifteenth century, Tibetan artists such as Menla Dondrup had mastered the foreign traditions of Nepal, India, and China. One need only look at the murals of the Gyantse Kumbum and Tsuklak Khang (both,

ca. 1427–42), largely the work of Tibetan artists (as identified by inscriptions; see p. 24), to know that Tibetans were themselves capable of producing works of this quality and in a style similar to that in this work.[12] Whether painted by a Newari or a Tibetan, this Ganapati—with its imaginative composition, combining spiritual power and subtle aesthetic sensitivity—is one of the finest Tibetan paintings of any period. JCS

1 On the Tantric associations of Ganapati, see Bühnemann 1994 and Brown 1991.

2 *dus gsum rgyal ba'i thugs kyi rnam 'phul [la]s//*
rab 'bar nam [m]kha'i mdog can brjid pa'i sku//
hum phat drag pa'i nga ros bdud p[h]ung 'gems//
gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin la phyag 'tshal lo//

gang gi phrin las ma lus gcig bsdus pa//
pa dma ra' ga ltar gsal glang po'i gdong//
mi zad nor gyi gter 'dzin tshogs kyi bdag//
ga na pa ti'i zhabs la phyag 'tshal lo//

DPAL ldan 'BYOR pa'i dad pa rab rgyas shing//
blo gros BZANG PO bstan la gus pa yis//
yi dam rin chen tshogs bdag 'di bshengs pas//
srid 'dir phun tshogs 'dod dgu 'byor ba'i gter//
kun la dbang 'byor sa bcu rim bsgrod nas//
sku bzhi'i dbang phyug rdo rje mngon gyur shog/

These verses are followed by the *ye dharma* creed; they end with *mangalam bhavantu shubham* (may all things be auspicious!). In the actual inscription, the Tibetan syllables *dpal 'byor bzang po* (indicated in capital letters above) are written in red, distinguishing them from the rest of the inscription, which is written in black. This deliberate isolation of four syllables points to the likelihood that the scribe meant to highlight the donor's name, Peljor Sangpo.

3 Tucci 1949, vol. 1, p. 58; vol. 2, pp. 639–44, 696 n. 361. See also Tucci 1949, Table VII, on the Chongye (*'phyong rgyas*) family lineage in the appendix entitled "Genealogical Tables."

4 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 639.

5 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 26.

6 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 26ff.

7 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 639. It is noteworthy that the historical figure on the front of the painting, here postulated to be the donor Peljor Sangpo, wears gold and turquoise earrings.

8 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 642, 696 n. 361.

9 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 58. The bracketed Tibetan names in this quotation have been rendered in phonetic transliteration.

10 Jackson 1996, pp. 104, 114–15.

11 Ibid., p. 104.

12 See, for example, very similar scrollwork at Gyantse; Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pl. 97.

50. Arhat

Central Tibet, ca. 14th century
Distemper on cloth
64.8 x 54 cm (25½ x 21¼ in.)

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase (M.77.14.9)

This masterful work represents an arhat, or Buddhist elder, an archetype of early Indian Buddhist practitioners. The arhats are thought to have been among the historical Buddha's original disciples who reached enlightenment.[1] They became an established part of later Buddhist iconography, and, by using their miraculous powers to remain immortal, were meant to preserve and protect the faith until the appearance of the Future Buddha, Maitreya. Tibetans traditionally represented groups of sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen arhats, the iconography for which was first introduced to Tibet, from both India and China, certainly by the eleventh century and possibly earlier.[2] Arhats appear in the late-eleventh-century murals at Drathang monastery in south-central Tibet,[3] although their earliest appearance in a *thanka* thus far is in a late-thirteenth-century painting, now in the Musée Guimet, Paris,[4] where seventeen arhats surround a portrait of the fourth Taklung abbot, Onpo Lama Rinpoche. It is not yet possible to determine which arhat this work was intended to represent, since the rendering of the central figure does not follow any known iconographic prescriptions.[5]

The painting was clearly inspired by Chinese pictorial traditions, as seen in the physiognomies of the figures, in the landscape elements, and in the inclusion of Chinese-style furniture and vases. Although isolated elements of Chinese painting appear in eleventh-century Tibetan murals (notably in the Drathang murals mentioned above and in mural fragments from Shalu, dating to about 1027–40), Chinese pictorial elements and modes of representation (i.e., the introduction of spatial depth) became more common in Tibetan painting during the early fourteenth century, when strong ties between the Sakya order and the Chinese Yuan court fostered



artistic exchange between the two cultures. In 1306, Drakpa Gyeltsen went to the Yuan court to be installed as ruler of Shalu principality, returning to the monastery one year later with an international group of artists who had been trained by the Nepalese master Aniko (1244–1306). The Shalu murals produced by these artists combine Tibetan iconographic traditions with Newari artistic styles and Chinese architecture, landscape motifs, costume, and symbolism.

Pal, Little, and Rhie and Thurman have dated this *thanka* to the fourteenth century by virtue of its strong parallels with Chinese painting of the Yuan period (1279–1368) and—to a lesser extent—with the Song period (960–1279). Pal notes the parallels between the full, fleshy faces of this arhat and his attendants and those in late Song or Yuan works, for instance, *Water-moon Kuan-yin*, attributed to Yen Hui (first half of the fourteenth century), now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.[6] He also notes that the shape of the vase held by a monk in the painting's top right corner reflects the Qingbai-type vase produced during the Yuan dynasty.[7] Rhie and Thurman describe the strong parallels between landscape elements in this work and those found in late-Southern Song and Yuan-period paintings, noting in particular the similarities between the pose and linear execution of the central figure and those found in a painting attributed to the early Yuan artist Yan Hui, now in the Rokuō-in, Kyoto.[8]

Despite these parallels, the painting differs significantly from Chinese models in its treatment of space. Although the artist has attempted to create a foreground (in which the main figure and the kneeling attendant appear), a middle ground (marked by the arhat's two standing attendants), and a background (occupied by the two smaller seated monks, their attendants, and the landscape and clouds), the painting remains essentially two-dimensional. It does not employ well-established Chinese techniques for conveying spatial depth, as can be seen, for example, in a group of Tibetan arhat paintings now in the Cleveland Museum of Art and ably discussed by Chinese painting specialist Stephen Little.[9] In the Cleveland paintings, which Little dates to about 1340–70, the arhats are presented in space that has palpable visual depth. As Little explains, this depth is created by the reduction in size of distant objects and by the creation of spatial "atmosphere," fashioned from clouds and windblown waves and grasses.[10] The Cleveland and Los Angeles works share the use of raised gold—here, in the border of the arhat's robe, and in the Cleveland work, along the spine of a dragon that accompanies the arhat Nagasena.[11]

If the treatment of space in this work is essentially Tibetan, so too is the compelling portrayal of the arhat in a fully frontal pose, with his intense gaze fixed on the viewer in a manner reminiscent of Tibetan painting and sculpture from the earliest period.[12] Although the arguments of previous scholars, noted above, for a fourteenth-century date are compelling, the links between this painting and the fifteenth-century Gyantse murals are also noteworthy. The especially lavish treatment of the robes and the presence of many Chinese elements (handled in a very Tibetan manner) foreshadow similar developments in the early-fifteenth-century murals of the Gyantse Kumbum and Tsuklak Khang. The fleshy, rounded body of the arhat and his short, extremely white nails, edged with a black line, are features seen also in the Gyantse murals, as is the manner of barely parting the lips in order to reveal the teeth.[13] The richly patterned Chinese textiles, especially noteworthy in the animal-print robe of the arhat's kneeling attendant, are abundantly portrayed at Gyantse,[14] as are the landscape motifs, although the latter reflect both Yuan and early Ming period artistic developments, and therefore postdate this painting.[15] JCS

1 Little 1992, p. 255.
2 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 556–57.
3 Henss, "Murals," 1997, pp. 163–67.
4 Published in Béguin and Colinart 1995, pp. 482–84; Singer and Denwood 1997, p. 62, pl. 43.
5 New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 104–6. However, Marylin Rhie has recently postulated that this may be Chudapanthaka because the iconography of the figure compares closely with that in an unpublished Tibetan painting, now in the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, in which the arhat is identified by inscription as Chudapanthaka. Professor Rhie's remarks were presented in a lecture in New York on March 28, 1998.
6 Published in Cleveland 1968, p. 207.
7 Pal 1983, p. 138.
8 New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, p. 106.
9 Little 1992.
10 Ibid., p. 257.
11 Ibid., p. 263.
12 For example, a ca. ninth-century bodhisattva banner from Dunhuang; see my introductory essay, fig. 1.
13 See Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, p. 220, and passim.
14 Ibid., pp. 207, 220, 221, and passim.
15 Ricca 1997, p. 203.

51. Portrait of Kunga Nyingpo

Central Tibet (Ngor monastery), ca. second quarter of the 15th century
Distemper on cloth
114.3 x 94 cm (45 x 37 in.)
Private collection

This magnificent painting portrays the Sakya hierarch Kunga Nyingpo (1092–1158), one of the early masters of the Sakya order and the son of Khon Khonchok Gyalpo, who founded Sakya monastery in 1073. Giuseppe Tucci, who first published this work, procured it from Ngor monastery; he believed that it had belonged originally to a group of portraits commissioned by the founder of the monastery, Ngorchen Kunga Sangpo (1382–1456), in about 1429, the year Ngor was established.[1] It is clear, however, that Kunga Sangpo commissioned many paintings between 1429 and 1456, so it is not possible to be precise about when, during this period, the present work was commissioned.[2]

The enthroned central figure appears against a red halo that echoes the shape of his body and also functions as a throne back. This nimbus is enlivened and enriched by deep red scrollwork; its border is marked by a delicate pattern of interlocking golden flower medallions, edged with a raised silver gesso line. Kunga Nyingpo sits in a meditative posture (*padmasana*); his large hands are held in the teaching gesture (*dharmachakra mudra*) while gently grasping the delicate stems of two blue lotuses. The lotus on the left supports a thunderbolt scepter (*vajra*) and the one on the right, a bell (*ghanta*), two attributes also associated with the deities Vajrasattva and Vajradhara. These attributes are also highlighted with gold and silver raised gesso work, which enhances the structure and details of the image.

Kunga Nyingpo's head is turned in three-quarter profile, revealing a strong aquiline nose and a gently drawn smile, an expression echoed in his contemplative eyes. The white hair of the elderly man is full on the sides, but he is noticeably bald on top; his beard and mustache are neatly trimmed. The monk wears a long-sleeved gray-blue robe adorned with elegant gold flowers, cinched at the waist with a white sash enlivened with a pattern of black interlocking geometric forms. Also adorned with delicate gold flower patterns, the yellow outer robe is lined with fur, intended to keep the wearer warm during winter meditations. He appears under a parasol of peacock feathers, the plumage of which is gathered by two blue rings and is adorned with flowing white streamers. Two offering goddesses borne by clouds flank the peak of the parasol.

Kunga Nyingpo's lotus platform is placed on a two-tier golden base. Much of the detail on the base is rendered in raised molding, with colored squares to suggest inset gems. Two rambunctious lions appear in spaces between the pillars supporting the upper tier, and a cloth adorned with two dragons falls over the central section of the throne base. Flowering vines that originate in the two lotuses held by Kunga Nyingpo join him to the eighteen subsidiary figures within medallions, among whom are his teachers and spiritual predecessors, including his father, Khon Khonchok Gyalpo.[3] The elegant, beautifully patterned flowering vine and the interconnected medallions enliven the blue background of the picture and provide a pleasing alternative to the registers of spiritual lineages often seen in earlier works.

Flanking the left side of the golden throne and connected by a scrolling vine that emerges from a vase are the seven gems (*sapta ratna*) of an enlightened monarch (chakravartin): wheel (suggesting the power to bring about religious conversion), elephant, horse (indicating military might), wish-fulfilling gem, wife, minister, and general. On the right side, also entwined by a vine emerging from a vase, are the eight auspicious emblems of Buddhism. This common group includes the parasol (symbol of royalty and sacred persons); two fish (suggesting the emancipation of the spiritually liberated); the conch shell (a symbol of the Buddha's word); the lotus (long associated with spirituality in both Buddhism and Hinduism); the wheel (suggesting the perpetuation of Buddhist teachings); the standard of victory (heralding the attainment of enlightenment); the vase (containing the elixir of immortality and representing the fulfillment of one's highest aspirations); and the noose, or endless knot (symbolizing longevity and the interrelation of all of life). The Tibetan scholar Dagyab Rinpoche has noted that the seven jewels may be offered to high ecclesiastics or secular dignitaries on such special occasions as their enthronement, the New Year, festivals of greeting, or other important celebrations.[4]

This work resembles earlier Tibetan portraits (see cat. no. 26) in that one finds idiosyncratic physical



details that suggest a particular individual (the large hands, the aquiline nose, the pattern of hair, the costume), together with features one would expect to find in portrayals of enlightened beings: the physical signs (*lakshanas*) of his transcendent nature are seen in the elongated earlobes, the circle between his eyebrows (*urna*), the wheels on the soles of the feet and the palms of the hands, as well as the posture and gesture. However, this portrait differs from most earlier examples in that the face and the large hands and feet suggest something of the man's earthy physical presence as well as his gentle, kindly character.

The strong circumstantial evidence linking this painting with Ngor cannot be further confirmed by examining in situ murals because the sanctuary was destroyed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–76). However, the painting shares elements of style with murals in the Gyantse Kumbum and Tsuklak Khang, painted during the second quarter of the fifteenth century and less than sixty miles from Ngor. In the Gyantse murals, one finds the flowering-vine motif used as a means of connecting elements in the composition.[5] The basic outline of Kunga Nyingpo's throne back is common at Gyantse,[6] as are the playful lions.[7] Even minor details, such as Kunga Nyingpo's short, very white nails, appear regularly in historical portraits at Gyantse.[8] JCS

1 See Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 333. In this publication, Tucci provides a transcription of the inscription along the bottom of the painting, which identifies the central figure as Kunga Nyingpo.
2 Jackson 1996, p. 78. See also New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 200–204.
3 These figures are identified in New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 200–202.
4 Dagyab 1995, pp. 81–82.
5 Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pls. 66, 147–60; Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, pl. 27.
6 Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pl. 74.
7 Ibid., pls. 68, 69; Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, pl. 10.
8 Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, pls. 105, 106.

52. Vaishravana

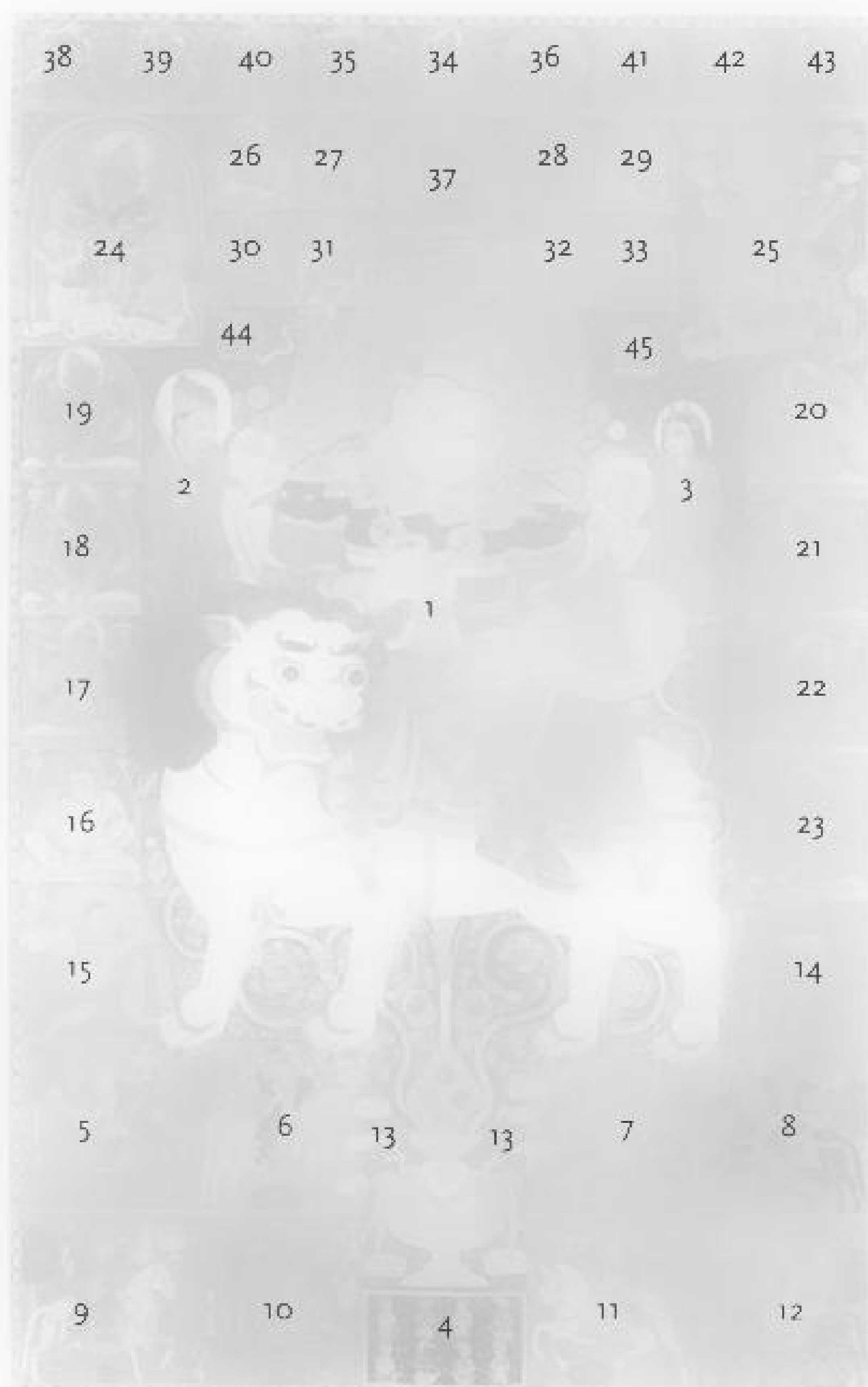
Central Tibet, ca. late 14th century
Distemper on cloth
160 x 99 cm (63 x 39 in.)
Musée National des Arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris (MA 5160)

Gilles Béguin and Sylvie Colinart have published a detailed study of this painting in which they describe the Central Asian roots of the ancient Indian deity Vaishravana, identify the members of his extensive assembly (see diagram, p. 184), and provide evidence for a late-fourteenth-century date.[1] The iconography of this marvelous painting differs from the slightly later example (cat. no. 53). Here, Vaishravana, as protector of the Buddhist faith (*dharmapala*), appears in his golden form, riding a white snow lion and accompanied by a larger entourage. He carries a victory banner (*dhvaja*) and a mongoose spitting jewels, the latter being a symbol of his association with wealth and abundance. As is appropriate for a deity sometimes connected with military campaigns, Vaishravana wears military armor and is accompanied by the Eight Lords of the Horses (*ashvapati*): Jambhala, Manibhadra, Purnabhadra, Bijakundalin, Kubera, Atavaka, Panchika, and Samjneya (nos. 5–12).

The identities of his two regal standing attendants are uncertain, although they are integral to Vaishravana's iconography and appear, much as they do here, in Vaishravana paintings from Tibet, China, and Central Asia.[2] The cows, trees, and pond that surround the vase beneath Vaishravana may allude to his Alakavati Paradise (nos. 13, 14). Eight snake deities (*nagarajas*) control the region below (no. 4). A portly figure pours gems from a large sack carried on his left shoulder, a reminder of Vaishravana's power to ensure wealth and abundance (no. 15). Eight manifestations of Jambhala, the peaceful form of Vaishravana, flank the main god in two side registers (nos. 16–23). Two related forms of Vaishravana, each surrounded by four attendants, appear near the top of the painting (nos. 24–33), and in the top register are Vajradhara (no. 34), Celestial Progenitor of the Kagyu and Sakya orders of Tibetan Buddhism, and eight protector deities (nos. 35–36, 38–43). Below Vajradhara is a wrathful form of the bodhisattva Vajrapani (no. 37), and flanking Vaishravana's halo are two unidentified figures, a Tibetan monk (no. 44) and a prince or other royal figure (no. 45).

The painting shows signs of new pictorial developments, particularly relating to the treatment of space. Although it retains much of the hieratic structure of earlier centuries, the composition is more fully




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52: Diagram

integrated. While still arranged in rows, subsidiary figures are no longer segregated into distinctive registers, and some figures and motifs (for example, the cows, trees, and the vase with scrolling vines) cut across these registers, forming a transition with adjacent areas. Moreover, Vaishravana's white snow lion pulls him forward into the foreground to distinguish him from his two standing attendants (who form a mid-ground) and from the painting's blue, flower-strewn background. These developments indicate a date toward the end of the fourteenth century—close, but prior to the more radical developments in composition and form seen in the Gyantse murals completed during the second quarter of the fifteenth century. A comparison with the early-fifteenth-century Vaishravana painting (cat. no. 53) reveals considerable differences in interpretation by artists working in the same region within a relatively short period of time. JCS

1 Béguin and Colinart 1994.
2 Ibid., pp. 142–43.

53. Vaishravana

Central Tibet, ca. first half of the 15th century
Distemper on linen
81.3 x 74 cm (32 x 29½ in.)
Private collection

This glorious, richly patterned painting depicts Vaishravana, guardian (lokapala) of the north and bestower of wealth, who is surrounded by members of his celestial army as he straddles a blue snow lion. This ancient Indian god assumed many iconographical forms that incorporated elements from various local traditions, since he was worshiped in India, China, and Central Asia before becoming popular in Tibet. Giuseppe Tucci argues, for example, that Vaishravana's hat was modeled on the crowns worn by Sassanian kings, and his armor reflects Iranian design.[1] Here, Vaishravana appears as King of the Horses—one of four mythic kings (*caturmaharaja*)—who rules over the northern quadrant of the earth, a role in which he also serves as protector of the Buddhist faith (*dharmapala*).

Tucci, who first published this painting in 1949, noted that in 742 the Indian Buddhist monk Amoghavajra invoked Vaishravana for protection in China as invading Tibetan, Arab, and Sogdian armies attacked the city of Anxi (Xinjiang).[2] His prayers were answered when "... a fearful army suddenly appearing amid a great earthquake put the enemy's troops to flight and delivered the city."[3] A Tibetan account of the origins of the noble Chongye family includes a similar story in which an eighth-century Tibetan prince led his army against China, protected by Vaishravana and his eight horsemen, who were depicted on flags carried into battle by the victorious Tibetan army.[4]

Dressed in the garb of a mythic warrior-king, Vaishravana wears heavy, highly ornamental armor with lion heads acting as lappets; the sleeves of his upper garment flutter as though moved by the wind, revealing armor-covered lower arms. He holds a victory banner (*dhvaja*) and, tucked under his left arm, a mongoose spitting gems. Another costume, consisting of a richly patterned textile, falls over his saddled snow-lion mount. Vaishravana's long dark tresses wrap around his upper ears and then fall onto his shoulders and upper torso.

He is accompanied by the Eight Lords of the Horses (*ashvapati*). Each is associated with a color, a symbol, and a point of the compass: Jambhala (white, three jewels,[5] the east), Purnabhadra (yellow, a vase, the south), Manibhadra (yellow, a gem, the west), Kubera (yellow, a sword, the north), Samjneya (white, a knife, the southeast), Atavaka (blue, a spear, the southwest), Panchika (yellow, a pavilion, the northwest), and Bijakundalin (blue, a sword, the northeast).[6] Each rides on storm clouds and they are accompanied by members of their demon armies. They and their steeds twist and turn in space, their fiery halos distorted as if blown by a ferocious wind.[7] Other figures, unidentified but clearly associated with Vaishravana's myth, include a portly figure carrying a striped sack on his shoulder, from which he pours gems and auspicious symbols, and a warrior on foot carrying a ritual staff.

The identities of the kingly figure grasping a sword and the adjacent, regally clad woman with an offering bowl have been the subject of much debate. Tucci believed them to be the king and queen of the *nagas* (serpent deities), who, having been conquered



by Vaishravana, offer obeisance to him.[8] More recently, Franco Ricca and Erberto Lo Bue have suggested that these two figures represent the Indian goddess Lakshmi and Pulastya, Vaishravana's father or grandfather, who lent his army to help Vaishravana in his battle against the *nagas*.[9] Gilles Béguin and Sylvie Colinart have analyzed various hypotheses about the identities of these figures in Vaishravana paintings from Dunhuang and elsewhere, pointing out the difficulties in all interpretations thus far proffered.[10] Future research may clarify the identities of these figures, who long ago became part of Vaishravana's iconography. Surrounding these richly detailed figures are the eight auspicious Buddhist symbols and the seven treasures of the chakravartin.

Vaishravana appears in the early-fourteenth-century murals at Shalu and in the century-later murals of the Gyantse Kumbum.[11] Although many iconographic elements of this painting appear in the Shalu Vaishravana (the cap style, armor, and blue snow-lion mount), this work is closer in style to the Gyantse murals, with which it shares close physiognomic similarities, rich textile designs, and similarly characterized horsemen whose fiery halos also assume a windblown flutter. This work is unusual in that it is painted on red linen (see Bruce-Gardner, essay, below), and its consecratory mantras are painted in gold on the *front* of the painting, beneath Vaishravana and his army, indicating the powerful role such mantras were thought to play even when unseen. JCS

1 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 573–74. See also Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 39–42.
2 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 573.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 574, 734–35. Béguin and Colinart (1994, p. 140) ascribe this Tibetan account to the late fourteenth century, but Tucci's translation of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Chronicles* places the story during the time of Padmasambhava, the eighth-century Indian Buddhist master.
5 Jambhala's identifying symbol is presented here as a tripartite blue gem.
6 Traditional names and identifying attributes vary for this group; this list follows that cited in Béguin and Colinart 1994, analyzing a similar painting in the Musée Guimet; see cat. no. 52.
7 Very similar windblown flaming halos appear in thirteenth–fourteenth century Taoist murals at the Yongle Palace; see Liao Ping 1985, pls. 30, 31.
8 Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 575.
9 Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, pp. 93–94.
10 Béguin and Colinart 1994, pp. 142–43.
11 Vitali 1990, pl. 49; Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, pls. 71–73.

54. Paintings for Evocation Rites

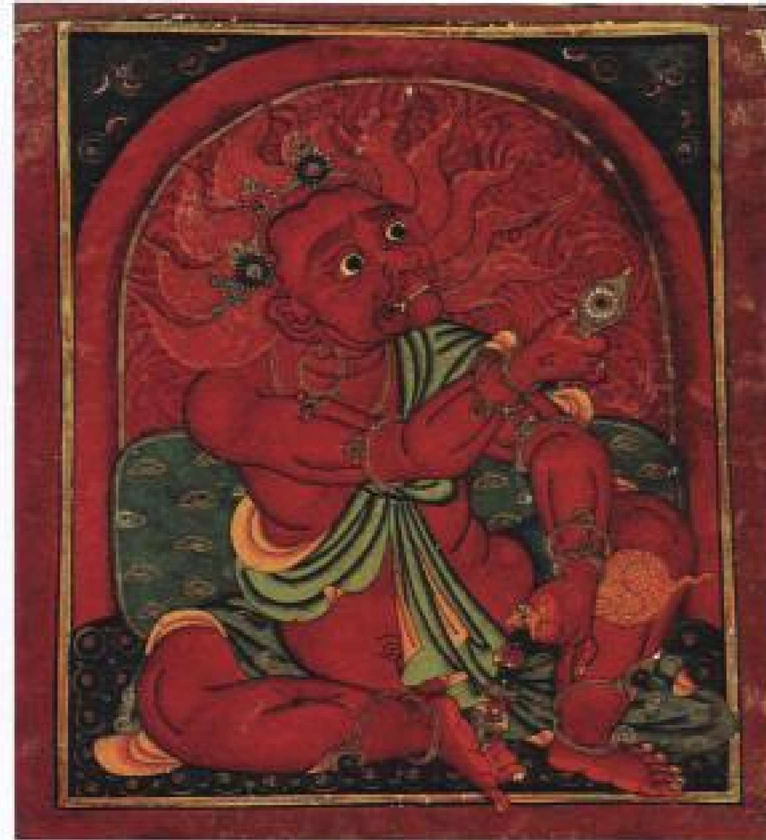
Central Tibet, ca. 1400–1450
Distemper on cloth, backed with thick paper
Each painting, ca. 17.5 x 16 cm (6⅞ x 6¼ in.)
Private collection

These small paintings (*tsakalis*) served in rites for evoking deities, which formed part of a disciple's training in the practice of visualization. According to Professor Alex Wayman, *tsakali* is a Tibetan transcription of the Sanskrit term *cakkali*, no longer in usage but perhaps related to the modern word *cakkala*, "circular."[1] Although no *cakkalis* survive, Wayman and others believe that they existed in medieval India and served a function similar to that of the Tibetan *tsakali*. Their diminutive size made it easier for lamas to carry the paintings from one monastery to another as they traveled to confer teachings. It also meant that the works could be propped on an offering table or easily held by a monk when, during evocation rites, the *tsakali*'s silk coverings were moved aside to "reveal" the deity to a disciple, which occurred after the disciple was well established in a meditative state. Little has been written about the ritual use of these works, but Wayman cites passages from several Tibetan sources that shed light on their function and meaning.

Evocation rites are known as *sadhanas*, the often elaborate procedures by which a disciple gradually comes to know a deity through a variety of meditative techniques, including visualization: the inward, mental construction of a deity. Texts such as the *Sadhanamala* (A Garland of Means for Attainment), a Sanskrit compendium of iconographic descriptions dating to about the eleventh century, repeatedly tell the reader to "meditate [on] himself as [the deity]. . . ." Iconographic details necessary for the deity's vivid cogitation (e.g., the number of arms, legs, and associated symbols) are all clearly described.[2] During the practice of evoking a deity, the initiate slowly



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strengthens his ability to see the deity within his own mind; the image in all its complexity is held firm during long periods of meditation. The initiate thus becomes increasingly identified with the deity and his sacred assembly, and he comes to know the powers and the wisdom associated with the deity.

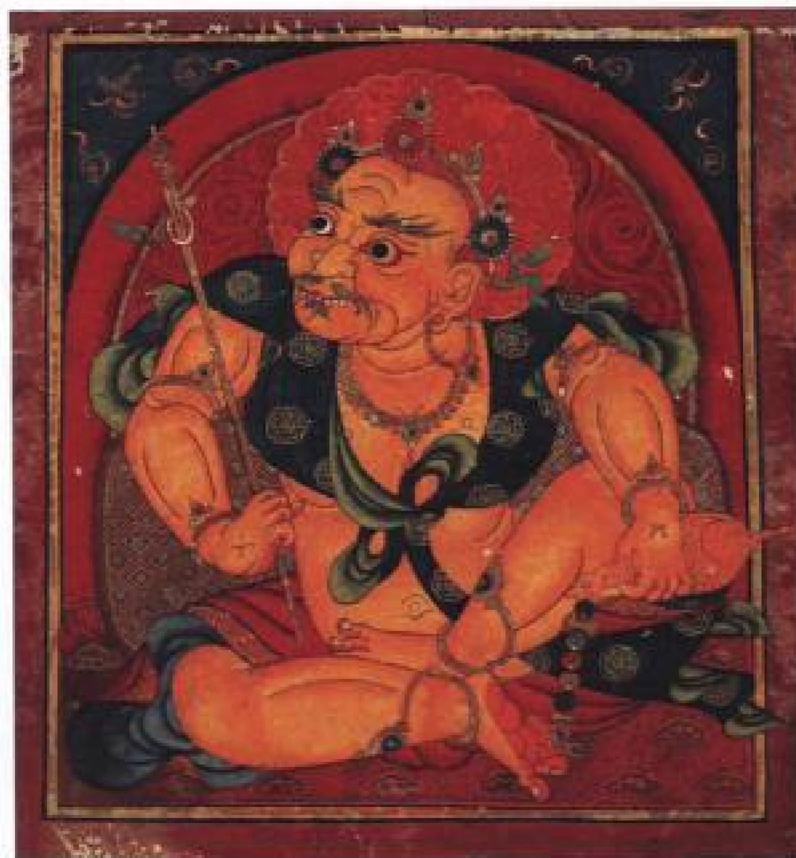
Ngawang Lobsang Choden (1642–1714), Second Cangca Khutuktu (a Gelukpa order reincarnation in Mongolia), wrote a treatise entitled "Explanation of the General [Form of] Permission," in which he described the initial stages of evocation. The disciple must first receive permission to evoke the deity, which is granted through his teacher. The disciple participates in initial purification ceremonies during which he listens to a discourse about the difficulty in achieving a human birth, the good fortune in having met an authentic *dharma* master, and the protective benefits of the deity he is about to evoke.

The disciple then envisions that an assembly of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities has gathered in the atmosphere in front of him, before whom he takes refuge in the "three jewels" (the Buddha, the *dharma*, and the monastic community). On a table nearby are arranged a variety of offerings (for example, perfumed water and butter lamps) and *tsakalis*. Citing a commentary by the Indian author Anandagarbha, Wayman notes that the *tsakalis* are covered until the disciple has already recited the deity's mantra and is well established in meditation, at which point the silk covering is moved, revealing the image of the deity to the receptive disciple.[3]

Tsong Khapa (1357–1419) wrote about the use of imagery in visualization practices, particularly noting the calming effect that results from meditation on a Buddha. However, Tsong Khapa cautioned: "Some place an icon in front, and viewing it with the eye, make a quick contemplation. This has been elegantly refuted by the teacher Yeshe De [*ye shes sde*]: *samadhi* [profound meditation] is not accomplished by what the senses are aware of; rather it is accomplished by what the mind is aware of."[4] In short, Tsong Khapa distinguishes between the effects of casual contemplation and those which result from the ability to generate vivid, inward images without resort to a sensual stimulus. Only by clearly seeing the image in "the mind's eye" does one experience the transformative benefits of visualization practice.

These six images are part of a larger group of *tsakalis*, other examples of which now survive in several private collections. Five (a–e) are probably from the retinue of the protector and wealth-bestowing deity Jambhala. Each holds a mongoose spitting jewels, an identifying symbol of Jambhala and the closely related deity, Vaishravana. The last deity is a Yogic adept (f). Inscriptions on the back of each image state the mantra *om ah hum*, and a–e also bear


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a number indicating the place in a sequence by which they were revealed to the disciple, that is, the third, sixth, seventh, eighth, and eleventh.

The style of this haunting, evocative group recalls the murals at the Gyantse Kumbum and Tsuklak Khang, dating to the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The figures possess vivid characterization and three-dimensionality, in which folds of the flesh and cloth are marked with washes of darker color, suggesting shadows and depth. The deities' shoulders and waists are covered by lively textiles in variegated colors and designs, beautifully draped to reveal contrasting reverse colors and patterns. Careful attention is drawn to the patterns of the carpets and the throne-back cushions. JCS

1 Wayman 1973, p. 57 n. 1.
2 Bhattacharyya 1968, p. 116, and passim.
3 Wayman 1973, p. 57.
4 Cited in Wayman 1973, p. 58.

55. Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch

Central Tibet, ca. early 15th century
Distemper on cloth
102.2 x 87.6 cm (40¼ x 34½ in.)
The Kronos Collections

This moving portrait departs from earlier conventions in that it presents the enthroned central figure somewhat informally, in a variation of *maharajalilasana*, the posture of royal ease. The seated teacher turns his head and torso to his left, fixing his eyes in a penetrating gaze as if to meet the eyes of a disciple. The gentle forward tilt of his head echoes the kindly, sensitive, intelligent expression of his face. His hands are held in a teaching gesture as his left hand also holds an Indian manuscript inscribed in Sanskrit.[1] The informal posture and the forward movement of the head, arms, and left foot serve to project the figure outside the picture plane, making him especially accessible to the viewer.

The identity of the hierarch remains unclear, although there is evidence suggesting that the work could be a depiction of the great Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha (982–1054). Clues to the identification of the central figure as Atisha include the Indian-style monk's robes (with the right shoulder bare) and the presence of an Indian-style manuscript whose narrow upper and lower covers resemble the shape of an Indian palm-leaf manuscript. More significant are the *stupas* (four surround the throne back) and the water jug behind the hierarch's right knee (the cylindrical blue object with a golden lid). These symbols are frequently associated with the iconography of Atisha.[2] Robert Bruce-Gardner has discovered that the hierarch's hat was originally yellow (see below), but the significance of this intriguing observation remains unclear.

Atisha was especially revered by the late-fourteenth-century Buddhist reformer Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), who was in some respects regarded as Atisha's heir. Tsong Khapa instituted radical reforms within Tibetan Buddhist communities, placing emphasis on the rules of monastic discipline (*vinaya*), which mirrored Atisha's reforms in the eleventh century. The Gelukpa order, founded by Tsong Khapa, was first known as the New Kadampa, after the order originally inspired by Atisha.

Tsong Khapa spent a significant period of time at Reting monastery, founded by Atisha's main disciple, Dromton, and seat of the Kadampa order. There, in 1403, Tsong Khapa wrote the *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, an exposition of Atisha's famous work, *A Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment*. Tsong Khapa's biography describes him sitting just north of the monastery, with a portrait painting of Atisha beside him:

> ... he made entreaties to Atisha and received a vision of all the lineages from the Buddha to his own teachers. The vision continued for one month, giving Tsong Khapa the chance to put forth many questions. Finally all the lineages dissolved into Atisha, Dromtonpa, Geshe Potowa and Geshe Shapawa [early Kadampa masters]. ... Then the latter three Masters absorbed into Atisha, who gave Tsong Khapa a blessing by placing his hand on Tsong Khapa's head.[3]

After this retreat, Tsong Khapa resolved to found a new order, based on renewed monastic discipline and a return to basic Mahayana practice as a prerequisite to more advanced Tantric teachings. At first, this order was called the New Kadampa, but later was known as the Gelukpa (those who follow virtuous works) or the Gandenpa, after the monastery he founded in 1409.



This hierarch portrait is remarkable for its inclusion of Karmapa (a Kagyu branch), Sakya, and Gelukpa monks in the top and side registers, as indicated by the style and color of their caps. Tsong Khapa had studied with Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Kadampa teachers, and his eclecticism was reflected in some of the institutions whose foundations he inspired; he had important ties with Gyantse, and his disciple Khedrup Je (1385–1438) was one of the founders of the Pelkhor Chöde monastery in 1418. This monastery, adjacent to the Gyantse Kumbum, had no specific sectarian affiliation—monks of the Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelukpa orders used it freely. A recent visitor to the Pelkhor Chöde noted a portrait of Atisha in one of its chapels.[4]

Toward the end of Tsong Khapa's life and after his death, his disciples founded many Gelukpa establishments in this region: Drepung (1416), Sera (1419), and Tashilungpo (1447). This painting was probably commissioned by one of these great Gelukpa institutions. The painting's donor (identified as such by inscription: *sbyin pa'i bdag po*) is presented in an unusually elaborate narrative. In the bottom register at the left, he sits on a high throne before offerings, next to a tall table holding vases and other containers. He is flanked on his right by seven standing monks and on his left by one standing and two seated monks; the latter bear offerings that include coral, horns, and Tibetan books. Unfortunately, no further information about the date and provenance of this work can be gleaned from this scene.

The painting's style ties it to the central regions of Tibet during the early fifteenth century. Many elements have roots in the Nepalese-inspired style of earlier centuries. With the roughly contemporaneous Dancing Ganapati (cat. no. 49) this work shares an extremely rich upper throne back, which here includes preening parrots nestled in the foliate scrollwork. Close parallels with the Gyantse murals can be found in many of the subsidiary figures: the features, body modeling, and thin, ornately arranged upper shawl of the two-armed Manjushri in the right register can be seen in a Vajraraga image at Gyantse.[5] Below the central figure's throne appear rugged blue and green cliffs, landscape elements inspired by developments within Chinese painting, first introduced during the fourteenth century and seen in earlier works such as the Los Angeles County Museum's Arhat (cat. no. 50). However, these landscape elements are closer to those seen in Yuan and early Ming Chinese paintings, and closer in style to other early-fifteenth-century Tibetan paintings, for example, an arhat painting in the British Museum that dates to about 1425.[6] JCS

1 The mostly illegible *devanagari* script may record the *ye dharma* creed.
2 See Reynolds, Heller, and Gyatso 1983, S40, p. 115, for a bronze image of Atisha now in the Newark Museum collection.
3 Thurman 1982, pp. 22–23.
4 Batchelor 1987, p. 297.
5 Published in Ricca and Lo Bue 1993, p. 135.
6 Published in New York, *Wisdom*, 1991, pp. 110–111.



55: Detail

Realizations

Reflections on Technique in Early Central Tibetan Painting

Robert Bruce-Gardner



Figure 22. Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17), detail of eye

From the moment of their consecration, these paintings have been inhabited by gods—the resident deities realized through contemplation by religious practitioners and initiates—but they were created by mortals. Made not by ordinary men, but by gifted artists who worked with the limited materials found in the natural world around them: from trees or silk, the flax or cotton of the fields, with dyestuffs and the minerals of the earth, bound with glue derived from animals. Yet, whether the images are exquisitely refined, sensual, powerful, lyrical, tranquil, or vibrant, there seems to be no tangible human trace of the artist.

Whatever the ascribed style and date, however, close technical examination may on occasion reveal (beneath what might appear to be a rigidly doctrinal and iconographically predetermined surface image) the practices and idiosyncrasies of its construction, which allows a fleeting vision of the artist at work: the freedom of expression in the underdrawing, the confident energy or the restrained precision of the brushstroke, the variable fluidity of the paint itself, the occasional mistakes and omissions, or the breaking of conventions: in effect, the privileges of creativity.

Style and Technique

Descriptions and definitions of style are essentially the concern of the art historian; technique is the means by which the appearance, and thus the style, of any particular painting is achieved. Technique might be seen as the exploitation and manipulation of the materials available to the artist, to conform with current practice, or to fulfill the expectations of religious, social, or historical demand, determined by patronage and, ultimately, by the artist's individual talent.

Throughout its history, European art has been affected by the constant introduction of refinements and innovations in materials—and thus in techniques. Artists developed and exploited these with often striking individuality; influenced by precursors and influencing successors, they were easily identified as active within regional schools. In the history of Tibetan art there are no such significant changes or additions to the range of available materials, nor can many inspirational individual masters be identified. But what is significant in Tibetan art are the variations in the manipulation of these simple resources and the manner in which the pictorial image is achieved. This can be seen as the evolution of technique and consequent development of style.

A faithful modern copy of a fourteenth-century painting made with similar materials might appear identical in a photograph, but it is unlikely to seem so under scrutiny; the style may be the same, but almost certainly not the technique.

Tibetan paintings are constructed with three separate yet intimately interdependent layers. The physical nature of each governs the properties of the next and, ultimately, the appearance and quality of the pictorial image that can be achieved. The thread, yarn, and weave of the support will limit the type and the behavior of the ground layers that can be applied, and the constituent binding and surface preparation will enable, but also dictate, the subsequent applications of drawing and of paint. The artist can, therefore, define the criteria, from available resources and practice, that will allow stylistic expression and individual realization of a particular doctrinal commission.

The preparation of the materials and their application were crucial, not only for the painting's execution but also for its use in practice and, indeed, its survival. It is astonishing that so many works of devotional art, some nearly a thousand years old, retain the flexibility that has allowed them to be rolled and unrolled over the centuries. To invest a painting with such a quality required a profound, if received, understanding of the properties of the materials and techniques.

Supports

Although the majority of paintings in the exhibition were executed on a cotton support, it is not uncommon to find linen, or, more rarely, silk used. There is little inherent difference between cotton and linen in terms of physical and behavioral properties, and, as yet, the selection of one or the other does not indicate a particular regional practice or association with style. It is the thickness of the thread and the openness of the weave that define the character of the woven support and its functional ability. A thread that is fine but loosely woven will not adequately retain the ground applied to it and so will be prone to flaking and loss when rolled; a thick thread that is too tightly woven will require a proportionately thick ground to cover the weave, but without sufficient key, or interlocking grasp, in the interstices, it will be equally vulnerable.

Most *thankas* are medium to fine in thickness of thread and density of weave, from fifteen to thirty threads per square centimeter. This was not governed by the dimensions, as the larger paintings were often composed on two or more strips of cloth that were sewn together; the seams of the joins were suppressed by the ground. However, the support of the large Tara (cat. no. 3) appears to be a single piece, suggesting an unusually wide loom of more than thirty-two inches. Small images can also be found to have composite structures, even an assembly of different weaves, implying either a paucity of suitable material or a veneration for particular pieces of cloth. For instance, a small painting of Tara, measuring only thirteen by sixteen inches, was painted on a piece of cotton that had been holed and repaired before the application of ground and paint; this would seem an unlikely choice of support for the depiction of the goddess.[2] Subsequently, the painting was folded to a fraction of its size, which might indicate that at its consecration it was inserted, among other offerings, into a bronze sculpture. This might affirm the notion that, in addition to the image of Tara, the cloth itself was in some way empowered.

Apart from the celebrated blue-and-white check patterns on the cotton, linen, and silk that support some of the paintings from Kharakhoto, it is rare to find colored threads in early works.[3] However, the threads of the Vaishravana (cat. no. 53) are of dyed red linen, the color of which plays no optical role in the ground or surface image; might this cloth have been the property or even the robe of a revered monk or teacher?

The use of silk—because of its delicate, thin, and finely woven surface—was mostly confined to smaller images; the precisely detailed line drawing and subtle glaze modeling of Ushnishavijaya (cat. no. 6) was executed on silk with only the thinnest coating of ground; the color of the thread is still visible. Some silk paintings have been laminated onto more robust and durable supports, seen most notably in the genre depicting the footprints of significant lamas. The reasons for such specificity remain, as yet, unexplained. The preparation of silk would have been somewhat different, but other woven materials were first stitched to thin slats of wood at their edges, which were then tensioned within a larger rigid frame. If required, the tautness could be adjusted at any time during the painting process without exerting particular stress upon single points. The distortion of the weave around the edges is less pronounced when the stitching of attachment to the lath is close and regular, since the tension is then more evenly distributed. Once stretched, the support was probably sized with an animal glue to infuse and seal the fibers. It seems that the size was applied as a fairly dilute solution, as it cannot be discerned in isolation and does not fill the interstices of the weave. A thick layer of size would almost certainly have induced subsequent cracking and delamination, by reducing the key, or tooth, of the fabric and being dimensionally reactive to moisture and becoming more brittle with age.

Grounds

The ground, the predominantly white surface to which the drawing and painting were applied, also had its governing variants and limitations. Composed of a light-colored, inert substance—usually chalk or a claylike substance such as kaolin—and bound with an animal glue, it could be more or less absorbent—depending on the dilution of the sizing mixture and the degree of polish—and provide a smooth or an uneven surface, depending on its thickness and the weave of the support .

In current practice, which is, presumably, still traditional in this respect, a relatively small amount of warm, liquid glue is added to the powdery inert material, which is then mixed and kneaded in the hand like dough to ensure the even distribution of glue and the elimination of lumps of unbound dry material. More glue is added and stirred in a container until the correct balance and consistency have been achieved. It is critically important to assess the correct proportion and strength so that the dried ground is neither too loosely bound—and thus too absorbent and friable—nor so overbound that it becomes brittle and inflexible. The desired surface quality dictates the ratio and possibly the selection of the inert material. Kaolin, for instance, might have provided a more compressible surface, one capable of accepting a greater degree of burnishing and polish, and thus greater smoothness.

The ground mixture sometimes includes a tinting pigment to soften a strident white. The mixture is applied to both sides of the support, thus filling the interstices and incorporating the fibers of the threads, and so providing an integrated and secure bond. This seal protects the woven support from the natural agencies of deterioration and of potential embrittlement. After completion of the painting, when it was cut from its strainer, the support was never—unlike Western paintings on canvas—under biaxial tension, which helps to explain the retention of remarkable flexibility. The degree of absorbency of the ground can affect the fluidity and continuity of the brushstroke, so to achieve fine line and detail, a smooth and even surface must be provided; the refinement is in the polishing, or burnishing, of the ground. This ultimate intimacy of weave and ground is the key to the painting's survival, which is superbly illustrated in the suppleness and pristine condition of the Mandala of the Six Chakravartins (cat. no. 47a).

Grids and Drawings

When the desired ground surface was achieved, the composition, within prescribed parameters, was established. First, however, given the canonical rules of iconometry and hierarchical strictures, a basic line grid was most often imposed, either with the use of a tensioned thread that had been dipped in pigment and "snapped" against the surface—creating a straight line with a distinctive impact mark (fig. 23)—or drawn freehand, which produced characteristically imperfect lines of varying width and density (the consequence of the irregular pressure of the hand) and the fading of the line from the point at which the brush was reloaded.

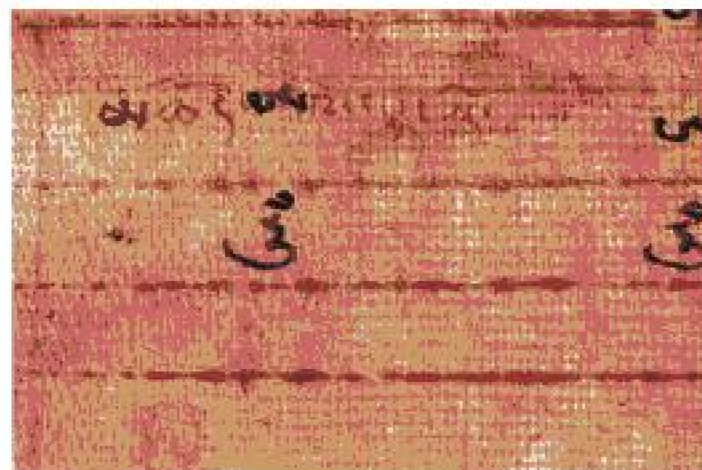


Figure 23. Example of red "snapped" lines of grid structure. *Thanka*, ca. thirteenth century (unpublished)

How extensive and elaborate these grids might have been, habitually or individually, is unclear, since they were ultimately obscured by paint. The grid may be seen at the margins or, where it has been applied in black, it can be detected in infrared examination, in which the carbon of black appears dark. But the grid and the preparatory drawing were often applied in a deep shade of red, which reflects in infrared and thus remains invisible. Therefore, it is not safe to assume that if a grid cannot be seen, then it is not present. It is possible, of course, to note the presence of colored grids or underdrawing in instances where small areas of the overlying paint have been abraded or lost, but exactly how often the basic grid was used cannot be determined.

The simplest gridlines define the compositional borders and margins indicating where the support is to be cut from its strainer on completion, with a central vertical axis marked, occasionally using corner-to-corner diagonals to locate the center point. An example of a more detailed grid structure, with a fluid line underdrawing, can be witnessed in an inexplicably abandoned composition, on the reverse of a painting which it closely resembles (figs. 24 and 25). The limited

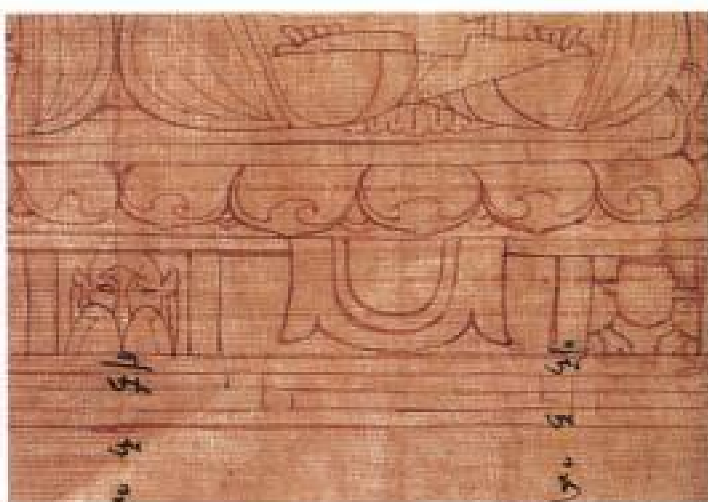


Figure 24. Grid and drawing. *Thanka*, ca. thirteenth century (unpublished)



Figure 25. Painted composition on front of *thanka*, ca. thirteenth century (unpublished)

extent of the drawing would seem to be typical, in basic outline, with only notational details of the physiognomy and drapery folds of the figures depicted within the basic structure of the composition. This type of drawing is naturally a prerequisite for painting and is based on the observance of iconographic demand, whether for portraiture, the representation of a particular deity with attendants, or the conventional geometry of the mandala. The drawings were executed in a thin fluid paint, but it is not possible to establish whether a preliminary composition was customarily made, using a less permanent medium. If there was a drawing in, say, charcoal, it would have been erased before paint was applied. This may be likely, because some residual evidence of such a stage may be detectable in, for instance, passages of exposed thin red paint lines (fig. 26). There is considerable range in the line of individual artists' drawing; some are rather formal and careful, others more free and expressive (fig. 27) or blandly formulaic (fig. 28). Brush widths vary, and this is a factor seen in the quality and finesse. In essence, underdrawings provide evidence of process rather than of creativity.

There is little advantage to the artist in pursuing the underdrawing beyond the outline, as the first stages of painting obscure any additional detail. Many instances of apparently imprecise rendering in paint of an underdrawn composition are interpreted as adaptations or changes of artistic intent. More pragmatically and simplistically, this probably only reflects the practice of painting: the first layer of paint is a flat, opaque field of color that obscures the drawing, and the exact repetition of any detail would be a matter of chance. As most underdrawing is loosely rendered and limited to outline and basic detail, significant adjustments would be obvious and, as such, seem to be rare. More detailed drawings may have been prepared for the inspection and approval of the patron before the painting itself commenced.

Pigments and Paint

The preparation of paint was elaborate and laborious, since the various pigments had differing requirements for grinding, cleansing of impurities, and binding. Apart from the organic colors—indigo and red lac—the pigments were minerals that were in common, almost universal, use. Most remarkable is the exclusion of lapis lazuli, which has not been identified in any of these early paintings, nor has it been recorded in later Tibetan art. The generally coarsely ground azurite and malachite, the blue and green derived from the same cuprous mineral, were the most critical to prepare properly for use as pigments. After their separation and the removal of



Figure 26. Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17), detail showing (perhaps) preliminary drawing in black



Figure 27. Example of lucid underdrawing with color notations



Figure 28. Example of formulaic underdrawing with color notations

their many impurities, care had to be taken when grinding, for as the particles became smaller, they lost their intensity of color. This accounts for the usually thicker layers in these color fields and the matte appearance of their granular surfaces, which scatter the light, and for the vulnerability of these areas, as the large particles, with voids between them, are comparatively underbound and more likely to flake or be affected by water and abrasion.

The most widely employed opaque red was vermilion, occurring naturally as cinnabar, and, less often, the varying hues of red earth. Minium and realgar, the two orange pigments, are sometimes superficially indistinguishable, but they can be found within the same painting, demonstrating a subtlety of choice. The predominant yellow was orpiment, sometimes used in a mixture with yellow ocher, which was infrequently used as an independent pigment. Indigo and red lac would presumably have been acquired in powder form, because their preparation as pigments is complex and specialized. For lac, a transparent inert base was stained when the dye was released from the source, an insect secretion, and indigo required a process to induce the precipitation of the colorant from the leaf of the harvested plant. Indigo has enormous tinting power; a minute proportion of the blue is discernible in a white matrix. Used pure, it has the intensity of black, with a subtle luster, and has been confused with black even by painters; when corresponding and mirrored elements of a particular composition were painted on one side in black and on the other in indigo, the difference was unnoticeable. The red of the lac was deep and transparent, used either in a mixture with white to form the familiar pink of early paintings or as a glaze that modified the color over which it was applied, as did a thin film of indigo.

The black was carbon, most likely the sooty product of burning wood or some other combustible material. White was equally generic, being essentially calcium-based, but like the ground layer, it could include a variety of inert ingredients. If pure chalk was used, it would be transparent and rather gray when wet, only appearing white as it dried. The ratio of white to binder varied, as can be seen in the differing degrees of gloss or matte in the passages of white within these paintings. Whether the proportion of glue depended on the exact nature of the white has yet to be resolved. Some white paint has been vulnerable to the same agents as malachite and azurite: it may have been thickly applied to compensate for transparency and then flaked, or if underbound it may have lost adhesion and if overbound have become brittle. This could be said of all pigments, but very fine and very large particles are the most difficult to manage: in preparation, in handling, and in terms of fragility. These few pigments, embellished with powdered gold bound with glue, produced the sumptuous colors of the Tibetan

palette represented in these paintings and, indeed, for the works of art of the next three centuries, until the introduction of synthetic pigments from the West.

Tibetan painters did not use a palette in the accepted sense as a surface on which paints were laid and on which they were mixed to load a brush of blended and variable color. Each pigment and each mixture of pigment had to be prepared as a required and prejudged color, in a pot or container that would serve as a constant reservoir of paint, for any particular composition. The warm glue binder was added until the correct balance for use as a paint was achieved. Such paint, often inaccurately termed as gouache, is technically and properly described as glue distemper; gouache is a medium in which opacified pigments have been bound in gum, quite distinct from the Tibetan use of animal glue. To ensure the retention of optimum quality, this quite liquid and warm paint had to be applied as quickly and uniformly as possible. If the mixture cooled or began to dry out, it had to be modified, either by rewarming or by adding more hot water or glue, which would alter the viscosity of the paint.

The basic required colors and mixtures for these early paintings were relatively limited; variants were achieved by glazing with the transparent colors. Later paintings reveal a significant increase in the number of subdivisions and shades, and probably a complex sequence of applications. Evidence of the sequence of painting can sometimes be observed where color fields overlap, especially those that delaminate, thus identifying the first and subsequent layers. Some painters were so precise that their work reveals practically no invasions of one color into another's domain, which makes the sequence hard to determine. The most frequent evidence suggests that the first rendering, throughout the entire composition, would have been of the color fields of blue and green. The rules governing the practice, whether pragmatic or ritual, are unclear at this early stage of study.

In some instances the color fields have been marked by notations, either a number or an abbreviated syllable, informing the artist of the color with which a particular element should be covered. This has led to some speculation that, once the drawing was complete, the task of underpainting would be given to an apprentice with insufficient knowledge or experience who would need the key to "painting by numbers." This may indeed have been the case on occasion, but the notations would equally serve the master as a pragmatic guide to the most effective and efficient expenditure of his paint while it was at its prime. It was not an opportunistic or personal decision to paint a pictorial element blue, for instance; this was determined by an approved and established fact or convention. To overlook an area of blue would, perhaps much later, require new preparation, perhaps inexactly, for a small area. Usually confined to larger, more complex and formal compositions, the earlier color notations seem to be only numerical, probably a reflection of the limited number of hues. Even those observed, however, do not exactly conform with a prescribed canon, in which, for instance, the number three is always green and the number four is always blue. It is possible that artists ascribed their own palettes with numbers rather than follow a ritual convention. The abbreviated word notations of later paintings could simply be a reaction to the extension of the range of colors, making a numerical reference erratic and complicated.

In the earliest of these *thankas* the paint was first applied in two layers, the second to achieve an even opacity and surface to receive the transparent glaze.

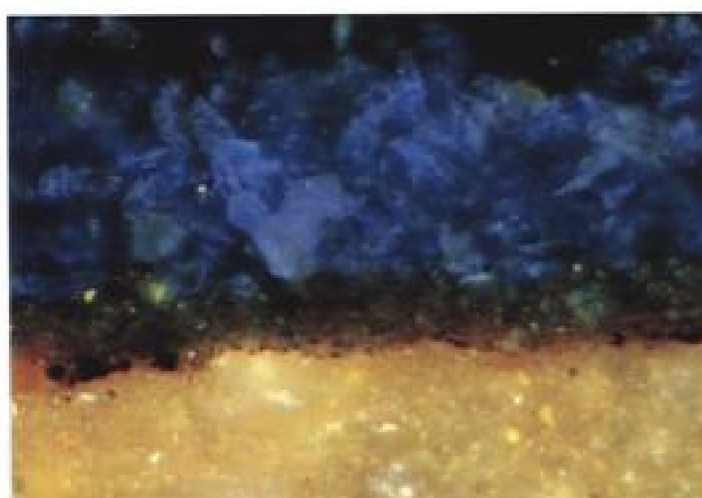


Figure 29. Portrait of Taklung Thangpa Chenpo (cat. no. 18), paint cross section, blue layer

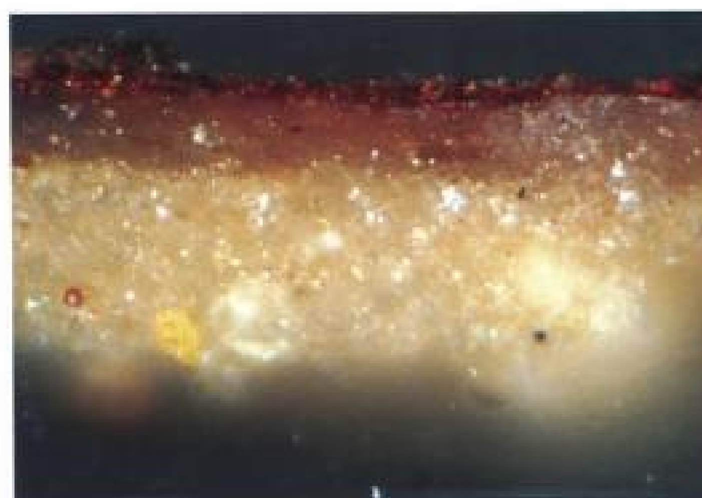


Figure 30. Portrait of Taklung Thangpa Chenpo (cat. no. 18), paint cross section, red layer

This final layer was exploited in the modeling of form: to modify the tint of the base layer, to impose decorative motifs, and to add features and outline definition to the composition. Cross-section samples of paint, greatly magnified, taken from the classic Taklung Portrait of Thangpa Chenpo (cat. no. 18) reveal examples of the technique of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (figs. 29 and 30). The first layer structure of the blue was initially established in indigo, over which the more brilliant and costly azurite was laid; the second, from the lotus platform, shows the top surface as a deep red glaze over the white and red lac mixture of the pink substrate. However typical such technique might be, it must be accepted that each painting is individual in its making. Differences and adaptations occur even within a small selection of paintings of the earliest dates, from the late eleventh and the twelfth century.

The Paintings

The composition of Manjushri (cat. no. 7) is striking both in adherence to convention and in innovation; the style of the central figure and the upper register of Buddhas, whatever the finesse of line, was constrained by the formality demanded in their depiction, but in the attendant groups, in the figures breaking the painted borders, and in the foliate design, we see that imagination was allowed free rein. The relatively matte paint, opaque and light in tone, was thin and fluid on a ground that left the weave exposed. In some areas, where the more intense and thicker layers of azurite and malachite have been abraded or lost, there is evidence of a lucid underdrawing; the stem structure of the partially exposed leaves in the upper right was reversed in the surface rendering.

The outline borders of the color fields were defined with a narrow brush and a controlled hand, then filled with broader fluid strokes; these areas are very precisely confined, with only occasional overlapping. The use of glazes gave modeled form to the figures and to the otherwise flat petals of the lotus, and it deepened the folds of the garments. There is no elaborate decoration; outline and detail in lac and indigo, along with additional highlights of opaque white, brought definition to the lyrical foliage. A deep indigo layer leaves the malachite of the throne back exposed, thus forming the scroll motif, a technique refined in later years (fig. 31). Areas of gold are usually underpainted, and the figure of Manjushri has two layers of yellow; the upper is warmer and more orange. The comparative stiffness of the gold paint is recorded in an X-ray detail (fig. 32). Within the careful outline, the broader but less fluid strokes can be



Figure 31. Manjushri (cat. no. 7), detail, central figure



Figure 32. Manjushri (cat. no. 7), X-ray detail, central figure



Figure 33. Book Cover with the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata and Attendants (cat. no. 8), duck and decorative motif on halo behind Sadaprarudita

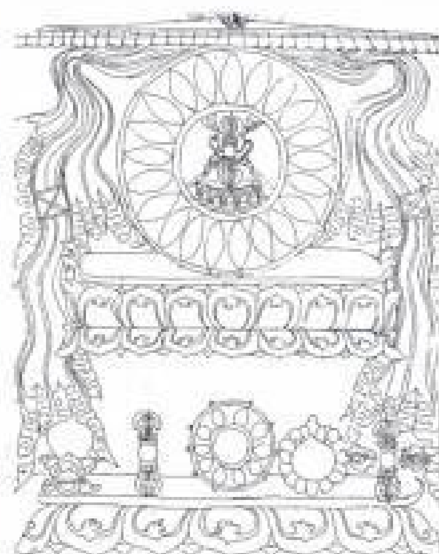


Figure 34. Buddha with Five Tathagatas (cat. no. 15), line drawing on reverse

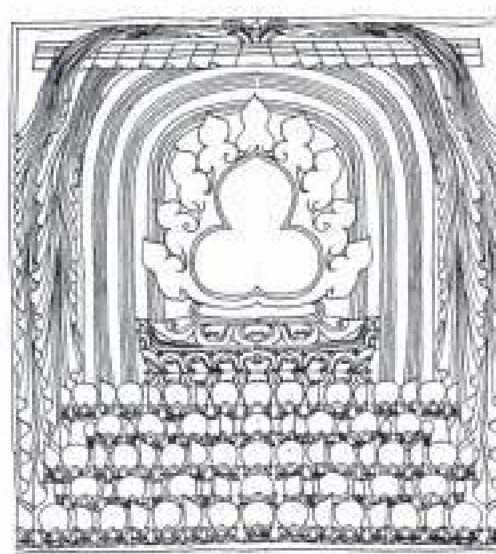


Figure 35. Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17), line drawing on reverse

seen, leaving the eyes, mouth, book, jewelry, and sash uncovered. The gold was finally given polish and luster by burnishing; the unburnished matte quality of the gold in the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait of a Lama (cat. no. 5) is less usual.

The Buddha with Five Tathagatas (cat. no. 15) and the Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17), two paintings with close stylistic references in religious and dynastic tradition and date, invite not only speculation into the role of the commissioning donor but also observation of the diversity found in a simple but increasingly refined technique. It is difficult to visualize the original appearance of the Buddha because most of the light and white-based passages have been stained or darkened to some degree, but in technique it differs from the Manjushri. Here, the few basic colors have been modified and so multiplied by overlying glazes, and they have been outlined and embellished with exquisitely fine lines. The vertical yellow panels of the temple structure at either side of the Buddha bear traces of delicate drawing, in opaque red, of *vyalas*, and above his head, in the yellow aureole, a minute Garuda in black, which is surrounded by an illegible pattern drawing, possibly similar to that more accessibly visible in the yellow above the left-hand figure in the large Book Cover (cat. no. 8) painted on wood (fig. 33). In the Buddha, the contrast between the gloss of most pigments and the matte of the azurite and malachite is emphasized in reflecting light. The evolved and detailed border decoration of the Buddha is an element shared with the Buddhist Hierarch, as is the extent of drawing on the reverse of the painting. Devoid of any devotional or invocational script, the drawing on the reverse of the Buddha is precise and confident (fig. 34); the symbolic elements of the composition, rendered in thinned red paint, occupy the whole surface. The larger size of the Buddhist Hierarch allows for greater elaboration in the drawing (fig. 35): in the freely applied flying tendrils, in the more formal architectural elements with washes of color giving volume to the black outline drawing. This is a demonstration of virtuosity and an extension of the technique with the addition of color. This could be a summary of the painting itself: virtuosity and exquisite, extensive use of gold.

The Buddhist Hierarch is a painting that must have been commissioned with opulence in mind, perhaps to express a very particular reverence for the image portrayed or to convey an as yet undetermined form of propaganda for the sect. The density and purity of the pigments; the quality and assurance of the artist's control of form, line, and expression and the amount and cost of the gold indicate a specific commission. The appearance of the paint is of greater intensity than that of the Buddha, slightly less well bound and therefore less glossy. The number of

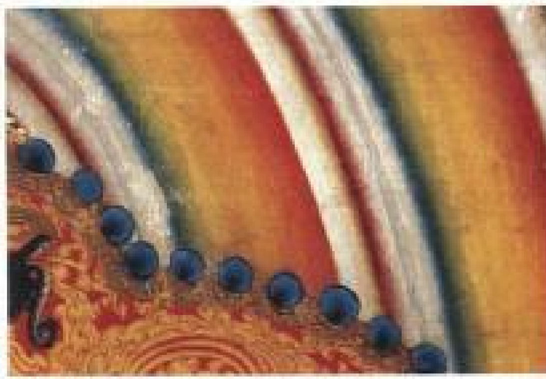


Figure 36. Detail of glaze technique on rainbow

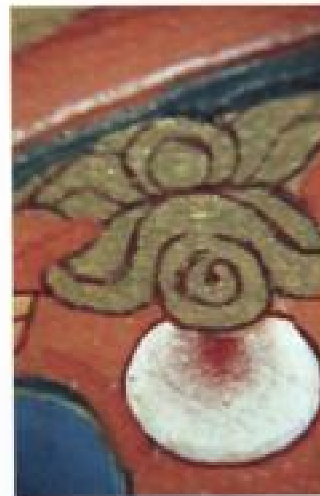


Figure 37. Detail of glaze technique on scrolling-vine motif

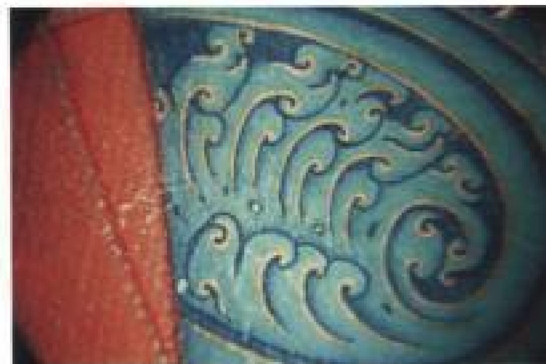


Figure 38. Detail of glaze technique on scrollwork



Figure 39. Detail of viscous paint of white jewelry



Figure 40. Detail of gold scroll motif on drapery of Hierarch

Figures 36–40. Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17)

colors, the number of pots of pigments and the mixture of pigments that the artist prepared was as limited, but the overriding difference is in the opulent use of gold and glazes.

The dominant splendors of the overarching rainbows are, basically, alternating bands of white and yellow. The spectrum was made with thin and repeated washes of lac and of indigo: lac as red, over yellow becoming orange, fading to yellow; the yellow intensified to green under a wash of indigo; the indigo alone being blue. The evident continuity and evenness is masterful, because the technique allows for no mistakes; indeed, it relies upon even the faintest of marks making a visible difference to the layer below. The same control can be seen in the delicate wash around the features of the Hierarch (fig. 22) and in the modeling of form throughout the painting. In the scrolling-vine motifs of the roundels, the technique is exploited in a different manner; a single and intense mark was made, and then the brush, laden only with water, was used to spread and diffuse that intensity around the edges of the mark, which seems to fade away (fig. 37).

Indigo was used, as before, to define the scrollwork of the green throne back. The outline drawing and the foliate detail of the motif were applied to the plain field of malachite. The dark, negative areas were blocked in with indigo; additional shading with thin washes gave more form and depth, and a contrasting opaque orange provided the final highlights (fig. 38).

In order to deliver a minute ornamental detail with precision, the viscosity had to be considerable. If the paint was too thin, it would disperse and spread on contact with the surface. Much thicker paint could form its own meniscus and stay where placed. The exact white dots of a miniature necklace (fig. 39) stand proud of the yellow paint; the craters in their centers were formed by the loss of volume as the water of the diluent evaporated. This precision and



Figure 41. Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 17), detail of paint exposed beneath gold droplets



Figure 42. Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 55), detail of *torana* showing increased range of palette



Figure 43. Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 55), detail showing yellow under red hat of Hierarch

mastery of detail is exemplified in the golden scrollwork of the yellow drapery (fig. 40), in which the folds, panels, and even the stitch marks of the red garment have been exquisitely rendered. The portrayal of Vaishravana in the lower register (see cat. no. 17, second figure from the left) invokes another reference; it is by intent rather than through error, surely, that the yellow of the face is lighter than that of the body. Might this be an echo of the practice, in gilt-bronze sculpture, of overpainting the face in "cold" gold, the powdered and glue-bound gold used in painting?

The golden flames of the lower register have a thin glaze of red over them. In other instances, notably on the gilded relief ornament, the raised gold and silver in the portrait of Kunga Nyingpo (cat. no. 51), the presence of a resinous glaze was found. This was used less to modify the color than to protect the surface and perhaps prevent the oxidation of the silver to black, a common practice in the final preparation of gilded book covers, particularly since they would be frequently handled.

The raised droplets of gold, so abundantly distributed throughout the painting of the Hierarch, were applied toward the end of its execution. This can be noted where some have become detached (fig. 41). The exposed underlayer can be seen to have been already painted in red, green, or blue, as in the alternating sequence of other painted jewelry. Such a practice makes sound sense, for it would have been almost impossible to locate with exactitude the myriad droplets of colored ground onto a surface where the composition was only a basic outline. The painting had to be well-established before such accuracy and refinement could be introduced. Astonishing control and judgment would have been required, as the fluidity and the amount of the mixture on the brush would dictate the size of the droplet delivered to the surface; to achieve the range yet regularity in the size and volume of the raised droplets demanded particular skill. The colored nature of the ground induces a warmth of tone in the gold, which was burnished to a high degree, imparting to the painting the quality of a jewel.

If such adaptations of an already sophisticated technique could occur within perhaps fifty or seventy-five years, the changes over the next two centuries should be no surprise. The early evolution, exemplified in the widespread and subtle use of glaze technique, was to be superseded by a fundamental expansion of the palette: not by the introduction of new pigments, for there were none, but by the admixture of tints and the variation of tonal grades. The palette of the early fifteenth century had a deeper resonance and intensity of color, which precluded similar glazed layers; glazes had to be laid upon lighter colors to be effective in color modification, but they could be used to deepen and enrich decorative devices. The Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch (cat. no. 55) employs such a palette of opaque, saturated, and dense colors, with many more mixtures and shades.



Figure 44. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins (cat. no. 47a), upper left roundel, detail of scrollwork showing color modification by glazing



Figure 45. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins, (cat. no. 47a), detail, painted surface, central section



Figure 46. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins (cat. no. 47a), X-ray of detail (fig. 45) showing individuality of brushstrokes

The introduction of landscape into the pictorial space, for instance, required a variety of tints of green and blue; unfamiliar colors were introduced for the increasingly elaborate motifs, clouds, birds, and flowers (fig. 42) and the more complex and flamboyant drapery. Preparations all had to be premixed and applied directly from the container as an even flat coating. On this were laid the decorative linear designs, the definition of the drapery and figures, and the shading and the deepening glazes over pink and red. The majority of the red areas were covered with a single and continuous glaze, rich in medium, decorated with a pattern now sometimes indecipherable. Most of the other decoration and definition are rendered in black, regardless of the base color.

With so many hues, the sequence of painting would be hard to determine, but the Portrait of a Buddhist Hierarch underwent considerable revision during the process of its creation, even a change in sect, or at least hat; yellow can be noted in the flaked losses of the red of his cap (fig. 43). Other passages and details have also been modified, but what circumstances caused such disparate alterations and who was responsible can, at present, only be an issue for speculation. The manner in which indigo was employed is closer to the technique of shading than to that of glazing; indigo was still used to create a gradient in volume and form, but it was less transparent. The lac in the lotuses of the roundels is a similarly deep and concentrated shade; however, in the pink lotus of the main figure the lac is thin and more a true glaze, although it is not to be found in the modeling of flesh or form in the figures. By contrast, the Nepalese artists responsible for the Vajravali cycle (cat. no. 47), of which the Mandala of the Six Chakravartins is one, had not lost the art of glazing. The base palette, although saturated and opaque, is again simple, with passages much lighter in tone, which allowed the extensive use of lac. The minutiae of the details are testament to the ultimate control of the medium and the hand, as is the incredibly refined and intricate scrollwork to the mastery of materials and the technical excellence of execution.

The outer band of the roundel in the upper left (fig. 44) comprises a sequence of colored segments: white, yellow, red, light blue, yellow, and again white; the flame pattern has been superimposed in lac, thus transforming the host color into deep pink, orange, dark red, purple, and again orange, while at the same time creating a continuous relief. The ring of dorjes and the innermost band are indigo and yellow with repeat designs highlighted in opaque yellow, modeled in relief with indigo. The circle and platform of lotus petals are defined by lac when over red and yellow and by indigo when over blue and green, accentuated with white. The intricate scroll patterns of the outer fields have been created with lac, leaving the tracery of the red exposed (fig. 45).

Such detailed mastery would seem to be a denial of the individual painter, but in an X ray (fig. 46), the

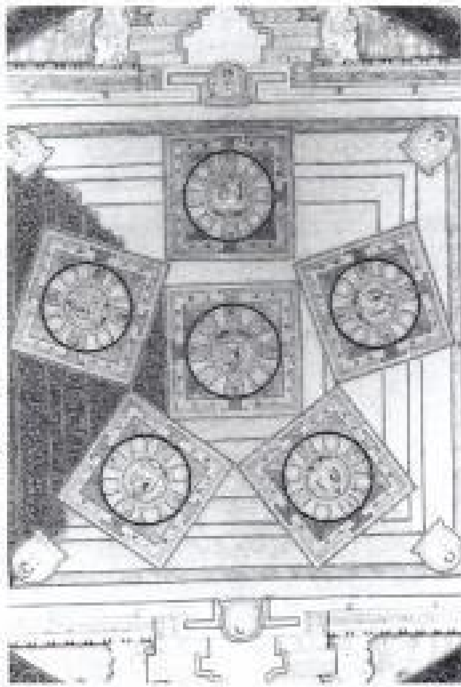


Figure 47. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins (cat. no. 47a), infrared detail of scrollwork, lower right quadrant



Figure 48. Mandala of the Six Chakravartins (cat. no. 47a), detail showing painted surface of area seen in fig. 47



Figure 49. Ushnishavijaya (cat. no. 6), reverse showing inscriptions within the form of a *stupa*



Figure 50. Vaishravana (cat. no. 53), detail showing head of male attendant

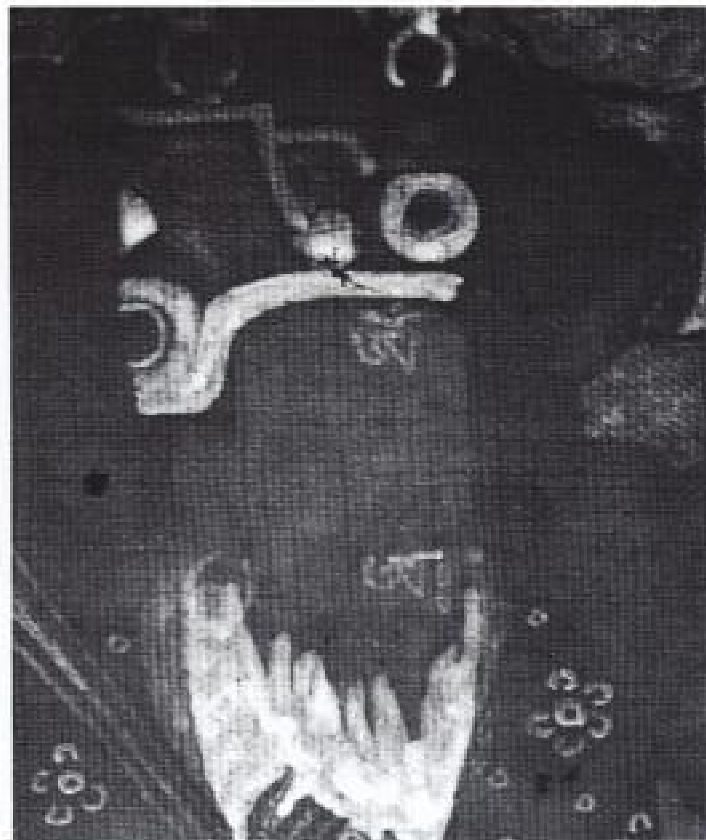


Figure 51. Vaishravana (cat. no. 53), X-ray photo showing mantra under painted surface



Figure 52. Yamantaka. *Thanka*, fifteenth century. Photograph, courtesy of Sotheby's New York

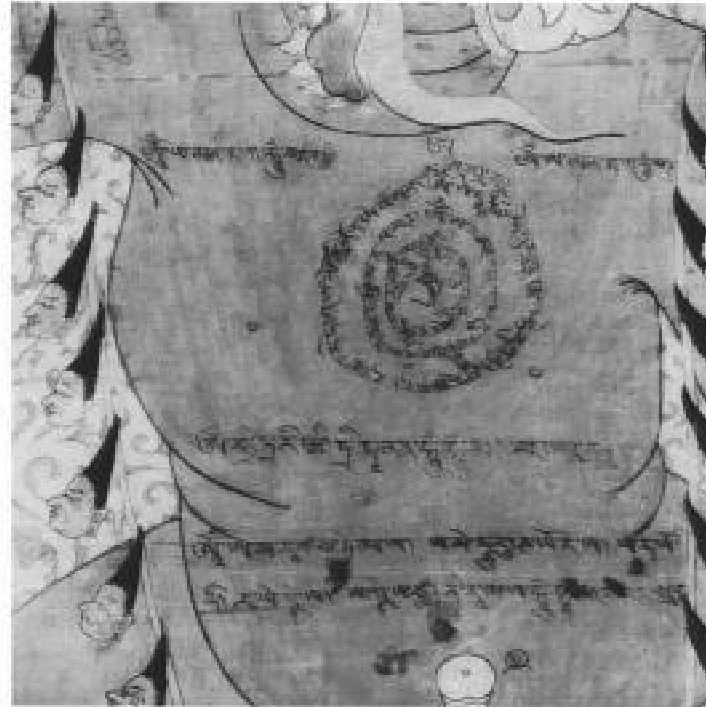


Figure 53. Infrared detail of Yamantaka (fig. 52), torso showing mantra and spiral creed under painted surface

personal and habitual brushstroke is revealed in the repetitive but expressive accuracy of blocking in the quadrant of uniform red; and in infrared (fig. 47), the apparently perfect transition of scrollwork from green to white (lower right) and white to red (upper left) is unmasked. The dark lines over the green are in black; they intrude slightly into the adjacent colors or are absent; in ordinary conditions (fig. 48) the observer would not notice, as the depth of the red compensated in intensity.

Such insights may be found in each and every painting, not so much as indicators of technique and related style, but more the painterly touch of the artist and the nature of his paint. Even the final stages of transition, from the painting to the consecrated domain of the deities, may have their hidden secrets.

Inscriptions

Most *thankas* have inscriptions on the reverse, in a variety of categories, colors and scripts (fig. 49); most often seen is a simple mantra, perhaps with Buddhist creeds, sometimes written within the form of a *stupa*. The mantras are cited on the reverse, behind the image of the deity or figure depicted on the front (fig. 50), and are frequently marked with a stroke of light yellow. It may be presumed that not many painters were also highly competent calligraphers, and that these location marks were for the guidance of such a specialist in the final preparation for the ceremony of consecration. This sanctification and empowerment incorporates and activates the written symbols at the reverse of images already painted, but this was not always the case. An X-ray detail of the figure on the left side of Vaishravana (fig. 51) reveals an instance in which the unpainted surface of the front, the space that was to be occupied, was empowered with the mantra and can be seen under the face of this figure.

The dark blue indigo of the figure of Yamantaka (fig. 52), transparent in infrared, allows a record of the otherwise invisible mantras and the spiral creed that sanctified the surface before painting commenced (fig. 53). Neither of these has any inscription on the reverse; there is no need. They bear a hidden message of transmission, unseen since the moments before their creation in paint. These are secret visions below the sacred images, wherein the gods may be realized by practiced men.

Glossary

abhaya mudra. The gesture of protection and reassurance

Achala (the Immovable). A *krodha* (wrathful) deity; protector of mandalas

Akshobhya (the Unshakable). One of the five transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas)

Amitabha (the Buddha of Infinite Light). One of the five transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas)

Amitayus (the Buddha of Eternal Life). Closely associated with, and sometimes known as, the Buddha Amitabha

Amoghasiddhi (of Infallible Accomplishment). One of the five transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas)

anjali mudra. The gesture of reverence or respect

Anuttarayoga Tantras. Unexcelled Yoga Tantras, the highest of the four classes of Esoteric Buddhist texts; the enlightened exponent of truth in these texts is usually a wrathful deity, often in sexual embrace with a consort

arhat. Buddhist elder who has gained enlightenment; an archetype of early Indian Buddhist practitioners

Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra (the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses). A text that describes the path of the bodhisattva

Avalokiteshvara. The bodhisattva who is the embodiment of compassion

bhadra. A type of Indian shrine with pyramidal terraced roofs

Bhairava. A wrathful aspect of Maheshvara (the Hindu god, Shiva), who was integrated into the Buddhist pantheon

Bhaisajyaguru. The medicine Buddha

bhumisparsha mudra. The earth-touching gesture

bodhyagri mudra. The gesture termed "wisdom fist," which occurs in an Esoteric context and is often associated with Vairochana

Bon. The pre-Buddhist indigenous Tibetan religion

Chakrasamvara (Samvara). A deity signifying supreme bliss; described in the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras

Chenresi. A Tibetan name for the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

chintamani. A wish-fulfilling jewel

dakinis. A class of wrathful female deities associated with the early stages of initiation into Esoteric Buddhism

dharmachakra mudra. The gesture of instruction: "turning the wheel" (*chakra*) "of the law" (dharma); often associated with the historic Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath and with the Tathagata Vairochana

dhyana mudra. The gesture of meditation

dvarapala. A door guardian

Esoteric Buddhism. Historically, the last phase of Buddhism to evolve in India; its yogic practices are thought to accelerate the path to enlightenment

Garuda. The solar man-bird who is the vehicle of Vishnu in Hinduism and an auspicious symbol in Buddhism

Gelukpa. An adherent of the Tibetan school founded by Tsong Khapa that revitalized the teachings of the Kadampas

ghanta. A ritual bell used in Esoteric rites

hamsas. Geese; auspicious symbols

Hayagriva. A horse-headed deity who often assists Avalokiteshvara

Heruka. A wrathful form of the Buddha Akshobhya

Hevajra Tantra. An Esoteric Buddhist text; one of the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras

Hinayana. The "Lesser Vehicle"; the earliest form of Indian Buddhism, wherein the historical Buddha is the primary focus of reverence

Jambhala. A god of wealth and prosperity

Jataka. A tale describing one of the former lives of the historical Buddha

Kadampa. An adherent of verbal advice; a member of the school of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Dromton, the main Tibetan disciple of Atisha

Kagyupa. An adherent of the school of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Marpa, Milarepa, and Gampopa, which traced its origins to the siddhas Naropa and Tilopa

kapala. A ritual skull cup

kartrika. A ritual "flaying" knife or chopper

khatvanga. A ritual staff

kinnaris, kinnaras. Female and male half human–half bird attendant creatures, often shown playing musical instruments; also the vehicles of Amoghasiddhi

krodha vighnantakas. Wrathful deities who are the destroyers of obstacles and guardians of the directions

Kubera. In India, the chief of the *yakshas* (earth deities), who was adopted into the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon, where he serves a propitious function

lakshana. A supra-natural physical mark that identifies the enlightened character of a deity or being

lalitasana. The seated posture of royal ease (with one leg pendant)

lama. A Tibetan Buddhist teacher or hierarch

maha. Suffix meaning "great"

Mahakala (the Great Lord of Death). A Buddhist deity who evolved from the Hindu god Shiva and served as a Buddhist protector

mahasiddha. A master of Esoteric Buddhism, usually one of a group of eighty-four

Mahayana. The "Great Vehicle"; the second phase of Indian Buddhism, wherein bodhisattvas became vehicles for beings seeking enlightenment

makara. A fantastic creature with characteristics of crocodiles and elephants; associated with water and, therefore, fecundity and auspiciousness

mandala. A sacred assembly featuring deities surrounded by an entourage; many are in the form of a palace, with the main deity at the center of multiple courtyards

Manjushri. The bodhisattva of wisdom

Manjuvajra. An Esoteric form of the bodhisattva Manjushri

mudra. A hand gesture with symbolic associations

nagarajas. Auspicious serpent kings who, together with their consorts, are sometimes shown as guardian figures

Nyingma. One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism; claims direct descent from the earliest phase of Tibetan Buddhism (dating to the Yarlung dynasty)

padma. Lotus

pata. A Sanskrit term for an Indian painting on cloth

paubha. A Nepalese term for a painting on cloth

Prajnaparamita. The goddess of transcendent wisdom

Raktayamari. A red form of Yamantaka, the archenemy of death

Ratnasambhava (Birth of Joy). One of the five transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas)

sadhanas (means of attainment). Evocation rites

Sakya. One of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, based at Sakya monastery in Tsang province

Shadakshari Lokeshvara. A form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

Shakyamuni. The historical Buddha

shmashana. Cremation ground; in Esoteric Buddhism, associated with the conjuring of wrathful deities

siddha. One who has attained perfection; *see* mahasiddha

stupa. A Buddhist reliquary mound

Sutra. Mahayana Buddhist text

Tanjur. Commentaries; part of the Tibetan Buddhist canon

Tantra. An Esoteric Buddhist ritual text

Tara. The Buddhist savioress and goddess of compassion

Tathagatas. An epithet for the historical Buddha; the term used for the five transcendent Buddhas

thanka. The Tibetan term for a painting on cloth

torana. An archway, sometimes freestanding, before a temple or *stupa*

tribhanga (thrice-bent posture). One of the most important poses in Indian art, in which the angles of the head, torso, and hips of a figure are all in opposition

triratna. A representation of the Buddha, dharma (Buddhist teachings), and *samgha* (monastic community), symbolized by three jewels

Unexcelled Yoga Tantra. The highest category of Esoteric Buddhist Tantras; deals largely with wrathful deities

ushnisha. The cranial protuberance on a deity or historical figure; indicative of spiritual wisdom and a sign of buddhahood

Vairochana (Buddha of the Zenith). Often the chief of the five transcendent Buddhas (Tathagatas)

vajra. A ritual implement associated with the indestructibility of Buddhist teachings; each end terminates in five-pointed prongs

Vajravarahi (the Diamond-like Sow). A consort of Samvara

Vajrayogini (Diamond Yogini). A wrathful goddess associated with Hevajra

varada mudra. The gesture of giving

vidyadharas. Garland or knowledge bearers; cloud-borne minor deities who bear various offerings to the central deity, including parasols, flowers, and musical instruments

vihara. Indian monastery

vinaya. The Buddhist rule of monastic conduct

vishvavajra. Two crossed *vajras*

vyala. A fantastic beast with the characteristics of a lion and a goat; often depicted as a throne guardian

Yamantaka. The archenemy of Yama (the Lord of Death)

yidam. A tutelary deity chosen by a practitioner as his patron

Yoga Tantra. The second from highest of the four major classes of Tantras in the Esoteric Buddhist tradition

yogin. A male practitioner of yoga; yogini, a female practitioner

Notes

The Cultural Roots of Early Central Tibetan Painting (pp. 3–24)

1 Christopher Beckwith discusses Greek and Roman influences in Tibet in Beckwith 1979. Tibetans may also have been introduced to Manichaeism and Nestorianism at this time. See Stein 1972, p. 60. For a detailed early account of *Ngadar*, see Roerich 1979, pp. 1–62.

2 Stein 1972, p. 49.

3 Snellgrove 1987, pp. 431–36.

4 Chinese and Tibetan armies were struggling for territory along their borders and elsewhere. See Stein 1972, pp. 64–65; Tucci 1980, pp. 5–6; and Heller, "Temples," 1997, p. 89.

5 D. Chattopadhyaya 1970, pp. 347–48.

6 New York 1982, pl. 125.

7 For example, a mandala fragment, published in Spanien and Imaeda 1978–79, vol. 2, pl. 41.

8 See Singer and Denwood 1997, pl. 73.

9 The Jokhang murals are fragmentary and difficult to date as yet with certainty. Scholars have suggested dates ranging from the seventh to the thirteenth century. See Vitali 1990, pls. 38–45, and Heller, "Temples," 1997, pls. 84, 85.

10 Early historians differ in their dating of Ralpacen's death and, indeed, in the chronology of the religious kings in general. This is due to the inaccurate dating system used in Tibet before 1027. For further analysis of this issue, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, p. 95 nn. 1350, 1351. On the Yarlung kings prior to the period of the religious kings, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, pp. 40–41 n. 535.

11 Interpretations vary regarding the severity of anti-Buddhist sentiments after 842, but at best it signaled the onset of a period of neglect: see Karmay 1988, pp. 2–3.

12 Early sources describe monks living as laymen but distinguishing themselves by a border on their robes. See Stein 1961, p. 61; Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1985, vol. *ja*, fol. 139b; Roerich 1979, pp. 60–69.

13 The number of these aspirants varies in literary sources. See Roerich 1979, pp. 65–67, and Vitali 1990, p. 37, and p. 62 n. 2. See Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, where Tentik appears in the far northwest corner of Map 9.

14 The date of their return is frequently given as 978. On the various chronologies of their return, see Vitali 1990, p. 62 n. 1. On Moragyel, see Roerich 1979, p. 74, and Vitali 1990, p. 37.

15 See Karmay 1980, pp. 153–55.

16 Roerich 1959, p. 63.

17 On the location or probable location of these centers, see Mishra 1973, p. 139.

18 See Seattle 1990 for a comprehensive introduction to the international legacy of eastern Indian medieval art.

19 Roerich 1959, p. xx.

20 Ibid., p. iii; see also Roerich 1979, pp. 1020–21.

21 Srivastava 1987, p. 45.

22 Roerich 1959, p. xl.

23 Ibid., pp. vi–viii.

24 Ibid., p. 59.

25 Snellgrove 1959, p. 107.

26 As translated by David Snellgrove in Snellgrove 1987, pp. 125–26.

27 Ibid., pp. 167–69.

28 Snellgrove 1959, vol. 1, p. 97.

29 Robert Linrothe, private correspondence, June 1997. His study will soon be published as *Compassionate Malevolence: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art*. See Linrothe 1999.

30 Mallman 1975, p. 222.

31 Bhattacharyya 1968, p. 116, and passim.

32 See Dagyab 1995, pp. 42–43.

33 The five differ slightly in textual sources. There are many groups of five associated with the five *Tathagata*, for example, the five components (*panchaskandha*). See Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, pp. 140–49.

34 After Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 2, p. 147, where they are described as the "Five Pristine Cognitions" (*panchajnana*).

35 Portions of the first chapter are translated into French by Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, in Mallman 1964, pp. 69–74.

The Sanskrit text is edited in Bhattacharyya 1949. A Tibetan translation appears in the *Tenjur*.

36 See Mallman 1975, p. 9, for a discussion of this gesture.

37 Roerich 1959, pp. xx, 92–93; Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1961, p. 290. Birendra Nath published the fragmentary murals at Nalanda in Nath 1983.

38 Translated by R. H. Van Gulik (see Gulik 1958, pp. 165–66), as cited in Seattle 1990, p. 100. B. N. Goswamy cites another translation of the same source in Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola 1976, p. 58.

39 The *Manjushrimulakalpa* was translated into Tibetan about 1060 by the Indian Kumarakalasha and the Tibetan Sakya Lodro. See Jayaswal 1934, p. 3.

40 "Le personnage principal est entouré d'assistants qui sont massés ou détachés symétriquement, ou tout au moins groupés avec certain souci d'équilibre"; Lalou 1930, p. 3.

41 Ibid., p. 15.

42 Coomaraswamy 1932, p. 15.

43 See Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola 1976. The precise date of its translation into Tibetan is not known, but Goswamy argues for a twelfth-century, or earlier, date; he dates the original Sanskrit text to the early Gupta period (p. xiii).

44 Coomaraswamy 1932, p. 18: "... not of course a shading intended to reproduce effects of light and shade, but that kind of shading of receding areas which produces an effect of roundness or relief."

45 See Goepper 1997.

46 Coomaraswamy (1932, p. 18) writes, "The faint or subtle shading designated by the word *ahairika* or *ahaivika* . . . can only logically refer to a wash or tone such as is constantly used at Ajanta to create the relief effect, and survives to a small degree in Rejput painting."

47 "In the Pratijnayaugandharayana of Bhasa, III, 1, a painting is made brighter (*ujjvalatara*) by rubbing, proof that the colors were well laid on"; Coomaraswamy 1932, pp. 16–17 n. 8.

48 Cited in Coomaraswamy 1932, pp. 16–17, n. 18.

49 Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola 1976, p. 88.

50 Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1961, p. 314.

51 Seattle 1990, p. 79.

52 London 1982, p. 17.

53 Most Indian palm-leaf books measure about 6 cm in height.

54 Published in Huntington 1984, fig. 179.

55 Ibid., figs. 45, 46, 181–84, and 189–91.

56 See Banerji 1981, pls. LIV (f), LXX, XC (a), XCIV (b). See also Washington 1985, pp. 144–45.

57 Although eastern Indian metalwork in low relief—perhaps repoussé—has been published in Banerji 1981, pls. LXIX (e, f).

58 Published in Munich 1991, pp. 24–25.

59 Published in Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, pl. 19 c–d.

60 Roerich 1959, pp. viii, xix, xx.

61 Ibid., pp. xli, xliii.

62 Ibid., p. 90.

63 Ibid., p. 74.

64 Ibid., pp. xx, 92–93.

65 Ibid., pp. 91–93.

66 Ibid., p. 92.

67 Snellgrove 1987, p. 477.

68 A. Chattopadhyaya 1981, p. 424.

69 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

70 Roerich 1979, p. 263.

71 Ibid., p. 264.

72 See Singer 1994, p. 93 n. 29.

73 See Chayet 1994.

74 Jackson 1996, p. 69.

75 Ibid., p. 69.

76 Stoddard 1996, p. 29.

77 Jackson 1996, pp. 69–70; Tucci 1949, vol. 1, p. 177, figs. 17, 18.

78 A. Chattopadhyaya 1981, p. 391.

79 Roerich 1979, pp. 435–36. Go Lotsawa devotes a long chapter to Marpa and his lineage; see Roerich 1979, pp. 399–725.

80 Ibid., p. 453. Other prominent Kagyu masters also had formative training with the Kadampas. In Thuken Lobsang Chogyi Nyima's (*thu bkan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*) *grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang 'dod tshul ston pa* (Explanation of the origin and general view of all the schools), one learns that Phakmo Drupa, a prominent disciple of Gampopa, also studied with Kadampas, as did his disciples Drigungpa and Taklung Thangpa Chenpo. See A. Chattopadhyaya 1981, p. 391.

81 Roerich 1979, pp. 560–62.

82 Ibid., p. 620.

83 Ibid., pp. 570–71.

84 Tucci 1949, vol. 1, p. 307.

85 For a more detailed analysis of portrait paintings, see Singer 1995.

86 Auboyer 1949, pp. 105–68.

87 Roerich 1979, p. 612.

88 Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1961, p. 316.

89 *bla ma nyid sku'i gzugs brnyan du 'byon pa*. Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa 1961, p. 316.

90 For a transliteration and translation of these creeds, see note 8 of cat. no. 5.

91 As with a portrait of Atisha, now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, published in Kossak 1990, fig. 3, and Singer 1994, fig. 16. It is unclear under what circumstances a painting might be reconsecrated, although, in general, successive consecrations were thought to increase the painting's sacredness. See Dagyab 1977, vol. 1, p. 33.

92 Dagyab 1977, vol. 1, pp. 32–35, and especially p. 33; see also Tucci 1949, vol. 2, pp. 308–16. I have also interviewed Tibetan monks on this subject, including Zenkar Rinpoche of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Tucci, however, noted that *om ah hum* is sometimes written on the back of a painting after (presumably, just after) the consecration ceremony is completed (Tucci 1949, vol. 2, p. 312).

93 Lalou 1930, p. 15.

94 For eastern Indian examples, see Bautze-Picron 1995.

95 See Chayet 1994, fig. 68, and Dagyab 1977, vol. 1, p. 25.

96 Similar inscriptions appear on other early paintings.

including a late-eleventh- or early-twelfth-century mandala of Mahashri Heruka, now in the Michael J. and Beata McCormick collection. See New York 1997, pp. 78–79.

97 Published in Goepper 1996, p. 216.

98 Roerich 1979, p. 623.

99 Ibid., p. 626.

100 Ibid., p. 625.

101 Ibid., p. 626.

102 Ibid., p. 447, and passim.

103 Ibid., p. 450.

104 On this system of patrimony, see Stein 1972, pp. 102–9.

105 Wylie 1978, p. 584.

106 Ibid., pp. 580–81; and Roerich 1979, pp. 494–99.

107 Shakabpa 1984, p. 61.

108 Ibid., p. 68.

109 Jing 1994, pp. 40–41; see also Guta 1997.

110 Vitali 1990, pp. 89–122, and Kreijger 1997, p. 175.

111 Wylie 1978, p. 583. Go Lotsawa mentions Drigungpa monks murdering other ecclesiastics. See Roerich 1979, p. 303.

112 Roerich 1979, p. 649.

113 Ibid., p. 631; see also Ngawang Namgyel 1972, p. 437.

114 Tucci 1949, vol. 1, p. 93.

115 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 43.

116 Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, p. 103.

117 See Jackson 1996 and Jackson 1997.

118 Ricca 1997.

The Development of Style in Early Central Tibetan Painting (pp. 25–47)

1 The stylistic comparison relies on sculptures as no Indian paintings in this style have survived. Vitali 1990, figs. 13, 14, 15, and p. 50; see also pp. 53–56, for a discussion of the style at Yemar, although Vitali's claim of a connection with the kingdom of Hsi-hsa has been questioned. See Stoddard 1996, pp. 29–30, 37.

2 Tucci, *Gyantse*, 1989, p. 136.

3 Vitali 1990, pl. 50; pp. 96–98.

4 Ibid., pls. 29–34; pp. 53–56.

5 Ibid., p. 50. Without a context, it is impossible to ascertain whether pacific deities (shared by both pantheons) are Mahayana or Esoteric Buddhist.

6 Singer 1994, fig. 14c (Yemar); Vitali 1990, pl. 34 (Drathang); Pritzker 1989, fig. 3 (Tabo). For a later court scene from the Sum Stek at Alchi, see Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977–80, vol. 1, pl. XVII.

7 See Heller, "Temples," 1997, pp. 98–101, on Denma Drak. See Paul 1995, pl. 22.

8 Singer 1994, p. 112.

9 Vitali, pp. 91–92.

10 Ibid., p. 131.

11 Robinson and Johnson 1997, p. 119. This shift corresponds with our thoughts about the emerging prominence of *Prajnaparamita* manuscripts beginning at this same period.

12 Ibid.

13 Nath 1977, pp. 269–71.

14 Losty 1989, pp. 88–89.

15 Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, pl. 45.

16 Ibid., pp. 50, 55.

17 London 1982, p. 20.

18 See J. Losty, entry 62, in Zwalf 1985, p. 59.

19 Losty 1989, pp. 86–96.

20 Ibid., p. 89. See also Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, fig. 29 for throne type.

21 Losty 1989, pp. 90–91.

22 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 20.589, Harriet Otis Croft Fund.

23 London 1990, no. 2, p. 16.

24 New York 1984, p. 88; Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, pp. 45–48.

25 Losty 1989, pp. 94–95.

26 Ibid., p. 95. Losty does not place the same emphasis on the predominantly Bengali style of the illuminations.

27 See J. Losty, entry 157, in Zwalf 1985, p. 116, and Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, p. 67, for an illustration of the page with the mandala.

28 It is interesting that while portraits of Tibetan lamas appear on early book covers, such as one of a pair in the Metropolitan Museum (1995.569.4a,b), none appears in manuscripts from India. For example, this is true of the *Prajnaparamita* manuscript in the British Library, which includes elaborate honorifics to the donor-patron on the manuscript inserted into the text. See Losty 1989, p. 91. Taranatha does report that portraits of Buddhist panditas and mahapanditas decorated the walls at Vikramashila, but to what extent we should take his report as gospel is unclear; see Dutt 1962, p. 362.

29 See Bhattacharya 1994, pp. 93–99.

30 In this way also, the Drathang murals are more Indian than Central Asian in style.

31 The fact that many have come out of Tibet is revealed by their embellishment with cold gilding or blue paint in the

hair. See, for example, the Tara (1979.38) from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection in the Asia Society, in Leidy 1994, p. 86 (where it is attributed incorrectly to Tibet rather than Bengal).

32 The nimbuses of Gupta Buddhas include bands of scrolling foliation, as well as the hanks of pearls. Thus the vine motif seems to signify abundance and prosperity.

33 Seattle 1990, p. 320.

34 Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988, p. 87.

35 Luce 1969–70, vol. 1, p. 322, and Singer 1994, p. 107.

36 Losty 1989, fig. 14, p. 95.

37 The surface of the Ford Tara is much abraded, as is typical of many *thankas* of this period. The binder for the pigments in the Portrait of a Lama has absorbed a great deal of dirt, some but unfortunately not all of which could be removed when the paintings were cleaned by Robert Bruce-Gardner.

38 Singer 1994, n. 60. It is unclear what the word "Mahabodhi" alludes to as an image.

39 Meister 1983, pl. 30.

40 Vitali 1990, pl. 34.

41 Henss, "Milarepa," 1997.

42 Highlights and shading are also used occasionally.

43 The same treatment is found in a Taklung portrait of Onpo Rinpoche in the Musée Guimet (MA 6083); illustrated J. C. Singer's essay "Taklung Painting," in Singer and Denwood 1997, p. 62.

44 Sankrityayana 1996. However, the visual evidence is tainted because the images have been reinforced with dark lines, making a precise dating impossible.

45 See Robinson and Johnson 1997, pp. 134–37.

46 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Samvara and Consort, 1995.233.

47 Losty 1989, p. 88.

48 Pal 1974–78, vol. 2, p. 202.

49 Kossak 1997, pp. 29, 31.

50 Ibid.

51 Vitali 1990, pp. 98–99.

52 Ibid., p. 89.

53 Ibid., pp. 105–8.

54 Ibid., p. 108. His name is Chimpa Sonam.

55 Ibid., p. 107.

56 Ibid., pl. 48.

57 The set was probably produced in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, before Ngor Monastery had been built. Verbal communication from David Jackson, Hamburg.

58 Jackson 1996, p. 77, pl. 2.

59 Liu Yuquan 1982, pp. 283–90.

60 See, for example, Pal 1984, no. 59.

61 I date the Amitayus (cat. no. 29) to the first half of the fourteenth century on the basis of the more elaborate treatment of the drapery, the splendor of the textiles, and the presence of the frontal standing bodhisattvas in one of the vignettes.

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1 London 1994, no. 13.

2 Milan 1993.

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By Robert J. Palmer

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